

NEGOTIATING TENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT:  
A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL  
REPRODUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY RURAL INDIA

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# NEGOTIATING TENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY RURAL INDIA

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This dissertation examines negotiations over development and social reproduction through the lens of education. Drawing on qualitative research conducted between 2006 and 2008 in the Aglar valley of Jaunpur, a rural mountain block in the Tehri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand state, north India, I show how education serves as a pivotal practice and discourse through which modern development is constituted, reproduced and negotiated as an individual experience and social trajectory of improvement and change. Education is embedded in a long-standing modernist vision of being and becoming, but through the lens of critical ethnography, I examine how this vision takes on lived meanings in a particular context. In Jaunpur, school education is seen as key to mobility and improvement through employment and educated dispositions, and for futures without agrarian, manual labor. I use the term ‘education-as-development’ to capture how school education and development are interwoven as projects of postcolonial governance and as sites for the social construction of modernity. I thus locate education in the broader dynamics and cultural politics of development, showing how notions of inclusion and exclusion are structured by and reproduce middle class valorization and rural dispossession. I therefore argue that education as a process of uneven socialization into a dominant ‘development subjectivity’, as educators in both government and alternative schools, parents and community elders, and young women and men varyingly negotiate *tensions of development* as they manifest

in and through school education. Such negotiations generate varied forms of educated subjectivity. As an analytic frame, tensions of development thus focuses on the dynamic, shifting relationships between liberal mandates of, and potentials for, socio-economic mobility and entitlement that development represents, and the reproduction of inequality, marginality and dispossession. These are tensions that resonate deeply in global histories of capitalist modernity and contemporary projects of neo-liberal development, yet also resonate with localized experiences, contestations and struggles over resources and values, over terms of change and social reproduction. By analyzing negotiations over education as a ‘contradictory resource’, this dissertation thus contributes to critical understandings of dynamics that shape cultural politics of development in contemporary India and beyond.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Karuna's interest in contradictions of education arose from her own experiences of schooling. Her early years of school were mostly spent in a government school in Stockholm, Sweden. She later attended high school at Kodaikanal International School, an elite private boarding school in the hills of south India, established at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to educate the children of foreign missionaries. When Karuna was at the school, it attracted a mix of 'global nomads': children of mixed heritage (like Karuna herself); wealthy urban Indians; Indians living abroad or recently returned to India; foreigners working for multinational corporations in India; elites from other South Asian countries, and a few children of foreign Christian 'social workers' (they are no longer allowed into India as 'missionaries'). The school is located in a hill-station town that, in the name of 'development', underwent significant environmental destruction and social change during the time that Karuna was living there. Under the guidance of a couple of teachers, she and a few friends began to see connections between their schooling, which was grooming them to be a part of a global elite, and a lack of awareness about and engagement in local issues. This conception of relationships between education and visions of development continued to shape her academic pursuits. Karuna joined her mother and sisters in the US for college studies, and sought out alternative public institutions there. Thus, she completed her BA at the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies at Sonoma State University, and at the Evergreen State College. In the course of her studies at Evergreen, she conducted independent study in India, learning Hindi and exploring issues around development on the ground. As a part of this, Karuna came into contact with the Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalaya (SIDH), an NGO working for alternative education and development in a rural valley in the central Indian Himalaya. SIDH

was another formative educational experience, and when Karuna eventually returned to academia to pursue an MS/PhD in the department of Development Sociology at Cornell, she based her research for both an MS thesis and this PhD dissertation on SIDH and the region in which they work. While this PhD marks the end of her direct involvement with academic pursuits, she continues to find meaning in exploring different means of learning and living. Currently, she shares these explorations with her husband and four-year old son in a village in Karnataka, south India.

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## INTRODUCTION:

### NEGOTIATING TENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY RURAL INDIA

The government opens schools in villages and says ‘we’ve developed the villages’, but if this is really development for the villagers is a different matter. *What is happening in schools, what kind of teaching—this is also a part of development.* (SIDH teacher)

...even if children go to terrible schools, it has an impact. (Amartya Sen, quoted in *The Hindu*, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2007)

There are good and bad things that come with education. The fact that we worry about the way things are going, that is also due to education. (Government primary school teacher)

In education there are lots of *grey areas*. (SIDH staff member)

During a visit to SIDH’s<sup>1</sup> primary school in Kandikhal village, I asked one of the class five children sitting down outside in front of the building studying English from a textbook what a particular story was about. I saw that it was titled “The Garden” and had a picture of a girl and a boy playing in a garden outside a house and nearby, a man—marked as a laborer/gardener by the fact that he was wearing a *dhoti* or *Indian-style* male dress—working in the garden. At the end of the page there was a vocabulary list with translations from English to Hindi. Under gardener it said “*maali*”. When I asked the boy what the story was about, he didn’t answer. So I pointed at the picture, at the gardener, and asked him who this person was. He said “*kisaan*”, farmer. In India, a *maali* employed to tend to an ornamental house garden marks an urban, middle or upper class habitus (Bourdieu 1984) that is distinctly different from that of the village-based, agrarian

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<sup>1</sup> The Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalaya (SIDH) is an NGO working in the field of alternative education and development in the region of my research. The organization is the focus of Chapter Three of this dissertation.

world and work of a *kisaan*. This boy studying in an ‘alternative’ NGO primary school interpreted the textbook picture in terms of his own life-world—that of a mountain village in north India—rather than the intended urban middle-class frame. Thus, his response was a reminder that young people in schools may not engage with pedagogical regimes as one would assume, but draw on their own experiences and everyday lives to interpret alien landscapes, irrelevant knowledge and restrictive disciplinary practices.

Another encounter with an even younger SIDH student provided a different insight. The *kachcha* (dirt) motorable road that connects the new SIDH campus to the main road was blocked with fallen rocks after heavy monsoonal rains. A group of male SIDH staff were mobilizing to clear the landslide. Sanjeev<sup>2</sup>, the five-year old son of a SIDH maintenance staff member of Nepali origin who lived with his family on the campus, was hanging around the SIDH office after school. He was attending SIDH’s new ‘English-medium’ pre-primary and primary school. I asked him if he was going to help the men clear the road. Sanjeev answered defiantly, “No way! I don’t do that kind of work, *I go to school*”. Little Sanjeev’s self-assured assertion that going to school was *obviously* antithetical to doing manual work—despite being part of an organization and school whose mandate was to counter such assumptions—starkly captured the power of education as an aspirational experience, valorizing middle-class, urban-based notions of work and identity while reiterating manual-work as the fate of ‘failures’ (Balagopalan 2002, 2008; Kumar 2000; Sarangapani 2003).

Finally, I recount a third experience that attuned me to yet other possibilities. I met Deepa, a young woman from Madhya Pradesh, on the SIDH upper campus where she stayed for a

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<sup>2</sup> To facilitate confidentiality, I have changed names of all individuals referenced in this dissertation except staff of SIDH, given that none requested anonymity, and that their contributions to this research were generally in the realm of public knowledge.

couple of months. One morning she asked me about my research, and I gave her my basic synopsis. We drank a cup of tea, and while Deepa worked on repairing a pair of children's pajamas, she shared the story of her own education. She said that she didn't go to school until she was thirteen or fourteen. Then this strong desire to go to school came to her. Her family told her 'for girls what is the point since they are not going to get a job, just get married'. But she argued, cried, even took a few beatings... Eventually they agreed; she studied until class nine, and just finished the prior year. She gave a telling analogy for why young people, and girls in particular, desire education even if they do not get jobs. Deepa explained that 'education is like a mango tree that we plant in our compound, it may or may not give fruit for a long time, or only seasonally, but there are other purposes, it gives so many other things: wood, shade, life... it is different from a whole plantation of mango trees that one plants to get fruit. Education is like that one mango tree. It gives us a sense of understanding, awareness—from going to school look where I've arrived'. Now she was in Kempty to study tailoring. I asked her why she was doing this. She said it was a skill that she can take with her anywhere, if she is ever alone or her economic condition requires, she can set up a shop. Or she wants to set up an organization to teach girls sewing in her village, illiterate but 'understanding' girls, and teach some functional literacy through this means as well. Deepa's narrative thus signaled the need to keep open "analytic space for the desire for 'development' in a variety of ways..." (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003:187). In particular, her evocative analogy suggests how educated subjectivities or the desire to 'become somebody' may resonate with different terms of value, resulting in "complicated and unpredictable links between what society offers and individuals choose" (Luttrell 1996:93).

Together, these three short stories from my fieldwork, and the varied perspectives they convey, represent my dissertation project. This is a study of uneven and negotiated experiences and evaluations of school education as institutional practice and social discourse in a rural mountain context in near-contemporary north India. Hence my study is not a ‘school ethnography’ in that it is not a detailed examination of schools and classroom practice and dynamics, but rather explores school education as a “mediating site for the production of a cultural politics of development” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003:35). Yet I chose to open with these comments to make a methodological point—building on Willis (1977, 1982)—that school education and development involve simultaneous dynamics of reproduction of dominant social norms and hierarchies through discipline, domination and governmentality, *and* potential ‘cultural production’, or the “...process of the creative use of discourses, meanings, materials, practices and group processes to explore, understand and creatively occupy particular positions, relations and sets of material possibilities” (Willis 1982:114, underlined in the original). This dissertation examines how such tensions structure social change in a particular time and place.

In the context of my research in rural north India, dominant notions of modern development frame school education as a social project and experience. Embedded in this model of education is a particular vision of being and becoming, of the present and the future. I argue that this is a longstanding modernist vision of individual accomplishment and social progress, yet stress the salience of examining how this vision and the liberal categorical lexicon it deploys play out in varying ways, and take on lived meanings, in a particular context. Historically, modern school education in India was instituted as a colonial project of socializing select populations into modern subjects, but was also central to the articulation of anti-colonial nationalism by Indian elites. As an aspect of postcolonial state formation, education has been

closely tied to state-led modern development as socio-economic progress and national citizenship. In contemporary India, where development ideals and practices are increasingly articulated in terms of a market-episteme or neo-liberal policies, education is seen as key to social mobility and access to middle-class lives of expanded ‘choice’.

Drawing on extensive qualitative research around questions of education and social change conducted between 2006 and 2008 in the Aglar valley of Jaunpur, a rural mountain block in the Tehri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand state, north India,<sup>3</sup> I demonstrate how educators, parents and youth participate in the production of a globalized ideal of development and contribute to giving it power as a vision of change and aspiration for the ‘good life’. Hence they contribute to the power of education-as-development as a governmental project and discourse shaping notions of self and sociality in the present and future. At the same time, I show how such commonsense is unevenly experienced and negotiated in relation to constitutive limitations and failures, and in relation to local conditions of social reproduction including competing notions of value and ways of conceptualizing and organizing life.

Analytically, I argue that such negotiations around education are a part of broader *tensions of development*. This term builds on Stoler and Cooper’s (1997) “tensions of empire”: tensions between hierarchies of production, power, and knowledge and the extension of universal reason, of market economics, and of citizenship, or “tensions between incorporation and differentiation that weighted differently at different times” (p.10). As an analytic frame, tensions of development thus focuses on the dynamic, shifting relationships between liberal mandates of, and potentials for, socio-economic mobility and entitlement that development represents, and the

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for reflections and details on research strategies and methods used as a part of this project.

reproduction of inequality, marginality and dispossession. In other words, it captures the ‘friction’ of global projects that work through universal aspirations and schemes, yet also as “engaged universals” that “can only be charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters” (Tsing 2004:1). I examine such tensions through multiple perspectives on education-as-development: as a project of governance, as an experience of individual and collective negotiation, and as a site of critical struggle. I specify these as both material and epistemic dynamics, about value in both economic and cultural terms, in a particular time and place. Tensions of development thus reflect “the difference-management projects that define the history of modernity” (Mazzarella 2003:39) and their articulations as neo-liberal development in contemporary India. As such, the analytic frame of this project captures some of the varied power dynamics that shape the cultural politics of development in contemporary India and beyond—thus engaging with a *critical sociology of development* concerned broadly with contradictions of capitalist/colonial modernity, and specifically with the neo-liberal conjuncture.

My study of tensions of development employs the methodological perspective of critical ethnography. Critical ethnography could be described as attempts to bridge ethnographic method with critical social theory, or, more subversively, as “turning one’s back on the analytic distinction between theory and ethnography...” (Tsing 1993:31). Beyond the use of ethnographic methods of field research, this term therefore signals more broadly how I go about analysis—the questions I ask and the ways I attempt to address them—in this project. It indicates my commitment to understanding people’s reflections on education and social change as concrete *social engagements* with constraints and possibilities that are a part of their lives, and as constitutive of contradictory and varied histories of power in a particular conjuncture. Critical ethnography is thus a way to take seriously, and stress the analytic salience of, people’s



reflections on lived experiences. But it is also a broad directive to think through how such concrete expressions resonate with, enable and are enabled by, broader processes and projects. Hence, it is a methodology of , “...situating local commentaries...within wider negotiations of meaning and power at the same time as recognizing local stakes and specificities” (Tsing 1993:9). In this task, I draw on three overlapping substantive areas of scholarship that have brought together ethnographic research and critical social theory: critical ethnographies of development, education, and rural social reproduction (in particular, contemporary forms of agrarian dispossession). My study attempts to capture these as “intersecting discursive fields in which social identifiers are created and maintained” (Tsing 1993:9). Critical ethnography therefore also indicates a simultaneous commitment to theory as a way of making a generalized point, where generalization is not about positivist abstraction but a way of relationally locating particularities as they constitute broader social dynamics (cf. Hart 2006), in a particular time and place (cf. Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). Hence, “theory is situated as it engages with locally specific puzzles” (Tsing 1993:32), as ‘engaged-universals’ (Tsing 2004).

Through a critical ethnography of education, development and social reproduction, my dissertation therefore contributes to understandings of how development is ‘accomplished’ (Li 1999) as a project of rule through disciplinary and governmental practices. Yet as Li (2007) points out and my research confirms, the limits of government are also contained in the inherent elisions, erasures and exclusions of these practices. By locating education-as-development as a rationale, social discourse and experience—all three of which are sites of negotiation—I therefore situate my project alongside efforts to ‘bring into dialogue the study of the rationale of governmental schemes and social history’, and to make use of ethnographic research to highlight ‘how programs of government are constituted and contested’ (Li 2007). I show how

contradictory impulses and inherent limitations and exclusions of education-as-development, as well as localized meanings and values, are reproduced and negotiated by teachers and school administrators, youth, parents and village elders through subject positions structured by class, generation, gender and place, and in relation to changing terms of social reproduction. Hence attention to how projects of governance are constructed and experienced in varying and often contradictory ways becomes a way to make sense of how they work to both reproduce social norms and regimes of power, as well as materially and culturally negotiate, and at times, contest and rework terms of social reproduction (cf. Willis 1977). Finally, critical ethnography is therefore also a methodological frame that necessitates a variegated theory of agency and power, for example to recognize both the productive power of modern development as governmentality *and* contradictory and negotiated experiences and evaluations of development as hegemony (cf. Baviskar 2007; Li 1999, 2007; Moore 1999).



Figure 1: View of the Aglar valley from SIDH's Bodhshala middle school, Kempty.

*Context: Education-As-Development and Changing Terms of Social Reproduction*

*Field research site*

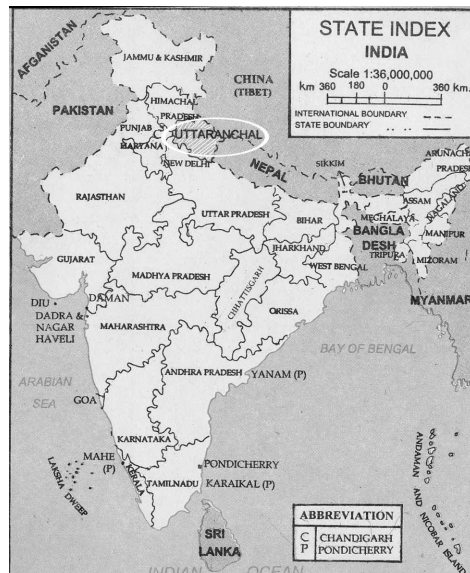


Figure 2: Location of Uttarkhand (formerly Uttaranchal) in India  
(Adapted from Nag and Saha 2003)

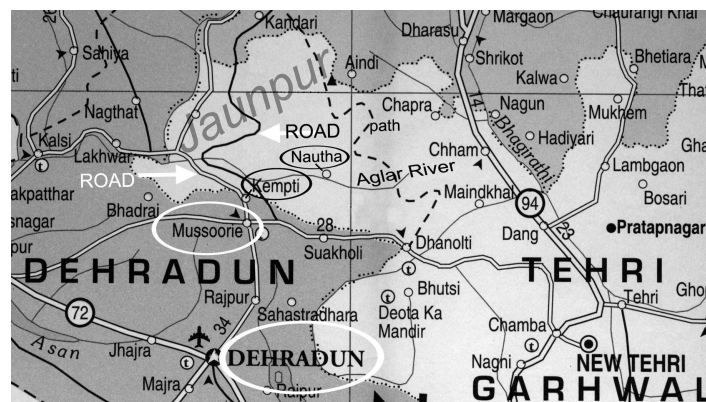


Figure 3: Location of Jaunpur block in Tehri Garhwal district, and Kempty in relation to Dehradun and Mussoorie.  
(Adapted from *Uttarakhand Political and Tourist Road Guide* 2003)

The empirical data in this dissertation draws on research conducted between August 2006 and December 2008 in the Aglar River valley region of the Jaunpur block of Tehri Garhwal district, Uttarakhand state, north India. Geographically, this region marks the 'foothills' of the western Himalaya, bridging the gentler Shivalik hills with the majestic Greater Himalayan range. The religious composition of the region is almost entirely Hindu, predominated by upper-castes who comprise eighty percent of the population in both Jaunpur block and Tehri Garhwal district (National Institute of Advanced Studies 2002).<sup>4</sup> People speak Jaunpuri, a local dialect of the regional Garhwali language, in their homes, while Hindi is widely used as a language of governance, commerce, education etc. Politically, this hill region was formerly a marginalized corner of India's largest and most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, and could historically have been characterized as a 'development rain shadow' (Pigg 1997:266): categorized as culturally and economically 'backward', populated by tribal and semi-tribal peoples with distinct cultural traditions, exploited as sources of labor and raw materials, and by-passed by state development projects such as roads, irrigation, healthcare and educational facilities. Uttarakhand was formed as an independent state in 2000 after a protracted struggle for separation from Uttar Pradesh.

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast to other regions of India, caste differentiations did not seem to have a major impact on educational discourses in Jaunpur, perhaps due to the relative predominance of upper castes. This is not to say that differences and inequalities, for example in land-ownership as well as status, do not exist in the villages of my research, but they are arguably less pronounced in these small mountain settlements than in villages of the plains of north India. For example, while sitting around and talking with a group of elderly men in a village, one very aged individual asked the man sitting next to him to cut his toe nails, to which he obliged. My research assistant later pointed out that the elderly man was of a caste considered untouchable, and the other an upper-caste Rajput, yet he was willing to touch the former's feet and nails, both considered particularly dirty. Such encounters fed my impressions (confirmed by my research assistant) that while caste is a sociological fact of consequence for social differentiation and hierarchy here too, the boundaries are often less starkly and violently imposed than in the plains. Given the questions that I explored in my research, I did not encounter and have thus not emphasized caste as a key category. In the Indian context, this omission needs special mention.

Demands for secession were based primarily on the economic and cultural marginalization of the hill region (cf. Mawdsley 1999; Rangan 1996).

Apart from a couple of small road-side administrative *qasba* (between a village and town in classification), the Aglar valley of Jaunpur is an entirely rural area with villages intermittently dotting both slopes of the river valley.<sup>5</sup> Villages in the Aglar valley are small, generally consisting of ten to twenty households, and are surrounded by steep terraced fields. The valley in many ways characterizes the mountainous, rural landscape of much of this newly formed hill state. Eighty-eight percent of the landscape of Uttarakhand is defined as hilly, three-fourths of the population of eight and a half million live in rural areas, and seventy percent depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Although only a small proportion of land in the hills is suitable for agriculture—only eleven percent is cultivated—agriculture (largely food grains grown for sustenance) and animal husbandry (a source of manure as well as cash income through sale of goats and milk) are the main source of livelihood for the majority of people living in the hill regions. Landholdings are small, the average size being less than one hectare. About three-fourths of crops grown in the hills are food grains such as wheat, maize, millet and other cereals. Agriculture is largely rain-fed; in the mountainous Tehri Garhwal district less than ten percent of land is irrigated (Planning Commission Government of India 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> The Aglar River is a tributary to the Yamuna River, and meets the Yamuna at Yamuna Pul, eighteen kilometers beyond Kempty.



Figure 4: The Aglar River and its valley, heading towards the Yamuna.

A recent development report on the state characterizes agriculture in Uttarakhand as “smallholder agriculture based on food crops, dominated by women, capital-starved and with poor infrastructure” (Planning Commission Government of India 2009:290). From this perspective, subsistence agriculture is seen as a handicap, or a “syndrome”, as it is not market-oriented and brings low per capita returns. Generally, current production patterns—centered around small, often scattered plots, rain-fed and focused on grain cultivation—in Jaunpur seem to reinforce perceptions of the limited economic viability of agrarian production in this context. During the time of my research, most household economies in Jaunpur were supplemented by some amount of male income-generating employment, and occasionally, female income-generating work such as tailoring and teaching. A few families with sufficient resources have ventured into growing cash crops like ginger and potatoes. A seasonal source of income for many men is various tourist services around Kempty Falls, a large waterfall and tourist attraction in the region. Others operate small businesses catering to locals and tourists in Kempty, are engaged as temporary labor locally, involved in construction contracting (often for government

sanctioned projects) or migrate to regional centers or larger cities for employment. Women mostly conduct household and farm work, though a few run tailoring shops in Kempty as well as surrounding villages. The most coveted form of employment for those with ten or more years of education is in public “*service*”, or government agencies such as the police, forest department or army, yet positions are highly competitive and few young men from villages in Jaunpur secure such jobs.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 5: Small villages and terraced fields in the Aglar valley, Jaunpur

Education is a key indicator of development and change in Jaunpur, and is pivotal to changing terms of social reproduction. Upon hearing about that my research had to do with

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<sup>6</sup> Apart from migration-based employment abroad, and, for an educated elite, high-end corporate (often IT) sector employment in urban India, employment in the public sector continues to be the most prized. Such jobs provide salaries many times higher than any other formal or informal employment in rural and small-town India, frequent salary revisions, as well as social security benefits like pensions otherwise completely absent from most people’s income-generating situations.

education and development, a village government primary school teacher responded that Jaunpur was a good choice as research site, as it has been “one of the most backward areas”. Another government school teacher added that ‘development is happening here, slowly slowly...’ An important referent of such perceptions of backwardness and progress is the state of educational facilities, which in turn is perceived as a basis for increased incorporation into a market economy. As a state-level development report put it, “A high-class literacy rate ensures cheap, readily available, and educated manpower at the grassroots level. Literacy also changes the general outlook and awareness of people and cultivates a sense of competition and desire to grow economically” (Planning Commission Government of India 2009:133). In policy as well as popular narratives, education is therefore a key referent in reflecting on changes from the past, and possibilities for the future in terms of ‘development’. Twenty years ago, there were few primary schools in the scattered villages of Jaunpur, teacher absenteeism was common, and children had to trek long distances to get to a school. Basic education was not a mass experience. However, the formation of the new hill state in 2000 brought increased development funding and intervention in the region, including a significant improvement in government school facilities.<sup>7</sup> At the time of my research, several villages had primary schools, as well as middle schools within fair proximity, and all the government schools which I visited seemed to be operating with some degree of regularity. Each side of the valley had one government inter-college (high school). The fact that school-based education, at least up to class five and increasingly class ten or twelve and even college, has become a part of daily life for communities in the Aglar valley in

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<sup>7</sup> This also coincides with a nation-wide expansion of mass primary education from 1994 onwards in India (Vasavi 2006). Hence the last ten to twenty years have seen a rapid increase in literacy in Uttarakhand, particularly evident in the rise of girls’ education, and the female literacy rate in the state went from 41% in 1991 to 60% in 2001 (Planning Commission Government of India 2009).



the last ten years, is thus perceived as a key indicator of increased development of the region, but as I show, is also a basis for significant contradictions and negotiations.

### *Education-as-development and rural social reproduction*

The uneven relationships between education and social reproduction are long-standing concerns of critical education scholarship.<sup>8</sup> For example, by analyzing the micro-politics of schools as expressing larger school-society relations, school ethnographies have highlighted how social reproduction as well as transformation work through regimes of power, as well as agency and contingency. From a Foucauldian perspective, the genealogy of the modern school has been traced to the imperatives of modern state formation, highlighting the school as an ‘assemblage’ of varied disciplinary technologies, purposeful yet also the result of historical improvisation (Hunter 1996). Overall, such critical studies of school education usefully highlight how particular regimes of truth, or ‘class cultures’, are reproduced and legitimated and thus become normative standards of being and thinking in a society while simultaneously mystifying their terms of inequality, and how such projects and processes work through explicit disciplinary interventions as well as often implicit discourses and practices. Thus, modern education has long been recognized as a contradictory project, as “State schooling in capitalist societies forms an important set of sites where such (inclusionary) invitations are differently ordered, and where “freedoms” are made available in ways that claim generality and equality, while producing and

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<sup>8</sup> cf. Levinson and Holland (1996) for a useful critical review of the literature on how school education works to reproduce inequalities of capitalism: from Marxian reproduction theories of the 1970’s such as Althusser’s (1971) notion of the ‘ideological state apparatus’, Bourdieu’s (1984) emphasis on the role of ‘cultural capital’, and Willis’ (1977) ‘cultural production’ that captured how complex dynamics of structuring and agency were affected by cultural practices in and against schools. As Levinson and Holland (1996) point out, such perspectives provide the bases for contemporary critical education studies, though they are now recognized as overly emphasizing class, Western contexts and structural power.

reproducing relations of power and difference” (Rousmaniere, Delhi, and de Conick-Smith 1997:6). Yet the important methodological point of critical school ethnographies has been to show the significance of people’s active cultural productions *despite* the often uneven outcomes in terms of social transformation (Willis 1977). Building on Willis’ (1977) seminal intervention, such scholarship remains useful for thinking about how contingency and agency may not only disrupt processes of reproduction, but be productive of new identities and social formations, indicating the complexities of school-society relations in varied contexts (cf. Foley 1990; Levinson and Holland 1996; Torres and Morrow 1995).

Yet despite significant contributions of nuanced scholarship on the historical and cultural politics of education, the focus has largely been on such processes in western liberal capitalist democracies. More critical policy-oriented perspectives on education in the Indian context have stressed the irrelevance of curricula for marginal communities (cf. Clarke 1997; Rampal 2002), and the social construction of education in relation to imperatives of nation-state formation and cultural productions of national citizenship in post-colonial India (cf. Kumar 1989).

Ethnographically informed studies have tended to focus on how varying subject positions and notions of citizenship structured by religion (cf. Sundar 2002; Froerer 2007), caste (cf. Ciotti 2006), language (cf. Benei 2005) class (cf. Donner 2005; Scrase 1993; Srivastava 1998; Thapan 1991) and gender (cf. Chopra 2005; Jeffery and Jeffery 1994; Gold 2002) intersect with educational experiences. Sarangapani (2003) has authored the only published book-length ethnography of a government school in India, and provides many rich insights into classroom dynamics as structured by pedagogical regimes and social discourses in a rapidly urbanizing village outside Delhi in north India. However, Sarangapani’s often astute observations are somewhat narrowly framed by a sociology of education. Hence while relationships between

educational regimes and broader social discourses and imperatives of development are often implicit, they are not the focus of her school ethnography. In the South Asian context, writings by Kumar (2000), Ahearn (2001), Klenk (2003, 2004, 2010), Balagopalan (2002, 2005, 2008), Da Costa (2008), Jeffery and Chopra (2005), and, in particular, Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery (2008) stand out as rare examinations of how varied educated subject positions are historically and relationally shaped as part of discourses and experiences of modernity and development. Several of these authors also contribute to "... understanding how schools are imbricated with the cultures and political economies of rural regions, and how their presence, functioning and/or dysfunctioning reflect the emergence of a new rurality" (Vasavi 2006:95).

***Padhoge Likhoge Banoge Nawaab* (Reading and Writing You Will Become a Nawaab)  
Song from *Malik* (Hindi film, 1958)**

*padhoge likhoge, banoge nawaab, tum banoge nawaab,  
jo kheloge koodoge hoge kharaab, tum hoge kharaab,*

reading writing, you will become a nawaab, you will become a nawaab  
playing and jumping, you will get spoilt, you will get spoilt

*jo bachche kabhi likhte padhte nahin,, vo izzat ki seedhi pe charhte nahin,*

children who don't ever write and read, they never climb the ladder of respect

*yahi din hain padhneke padh lo kitaab,*

these are the days to study so study your book

*buraee ke raste se bachkar chalo,*

be wary of walking the evil path

*kabhi jhoot bolo na choree karo,*

don't ever steal or tell a lie

*agar mar bhi jao na peena sharaab, nahi peena sharaab,*

even if you die don't drink alcohol, don't drink alcohol

*jawaharon ke Bharat mein Nehru bano,*

in bejewelled India become a Nehru

*tum itne bade ho ke Bapu bano,*

may you become so great as to become Bapu

*na ho duniya bhar mein tumhara jawaab,*

may in the whole world there be none your equal

*padhoge likhoge, banoge nawaab, tum banoge nawaab,  
jo kheloge koodoge hoge kharaab, tum hoge kharaab,*

reading writing, you will become a nawaab, you will become a nawaab  
playing and jumping, you will get spoilt, you will get spoilt

Figure 6: Text of Song *Padhoge Likhoge*

Given how deeply and thoroughly education is a part of Indian social landscapes,<sup>9</sup> relationships between education and wider social and economic contexts remain under-examined (cf. Jeffrey et al. 2008). This dearth of critical scholarly engagement with education in the South Asian context is a reflection of the extent to which education has been enframed by imperatives of modernization and human capital formation (McGovern 1999).<sup>10</sup> For example, the centrality of education for development has most famously been stressed by Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen. Sen and his colleagues' approach to development has been institutionalized as the "human development approach", assessed through the Human Development Index—a list of indicators to assess socio-economic development that seeks to include income but also broader factors such as education, social democracy, culture, human rights, gender, and health care (cf. Dreze and Sen 1995). Sen has also rearticulated this approach in a more philosophical discourse in terms of "development as freedom" (Sen 2000). Within both frameworks, education expands choice; the range of choice available to an individual, and the ability to actualize choices made, or "...the freedoms that people actually enjoy to lead the kind of lives they have reason to value" (Dreze and Sen 1995:13).

In the contemporary context—marked by continued expansion of mass education, yet where neoliberal reform policies have constrained avenues for mobility through formal employment and have also made preexisting, often more localized (and in the context of my research, agrarian) bases of social reproduction increasingly untenable—such contradictions

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<sup>9</sup> As Jeffrey et al. (2008) illustrate, education is a highly visible part of physical landscapes in almost any geographical setting in India. School buildings, signs, advertisements, school buses, tuition and coaching centers, children in uniforms etc. are hard to miss. The almost desperate aspirational quality of these facilities is also often starkly captured in their names and adverts. For example, near my in-laws' home in an upper-middle class residential colony in Hyderabad, there is a pre-school named "Power Kids".

<sup>10</sup> Hence, as Levinson and Holland (1996) point out, the shortage of critical examinations of school-society relations applies more broadly to other post-colonial contexts.

have served as a basis to question the optimism around education as a path to development (Jeffrey et al. 2008). In fact, given that education has played a key role in the historical accomplishment, expansion and legitimization of liberal development, contradictory outcomes of education may be “one of the most poignant illustrations of the polarizing structure of neoliberal policies” (Weiss 2004:15). In India, it has been noted that a growing gap between education and desirable employment opportunities has led to conflicting outcomes, where some are increasingly questioning the relevance of education (Balagopalan 2005), while others assert that education is more essential than ever for social mobility (Jeffrey et al. 2008) as other options appear unfeasible or undesirable.

In relation to contradictions that mark the current conjuncture, Sen’s approach has thus been critiqued for neglecting to pay attention to “...how power and culture mediate access to the freedoms that education provides” (Jeffrey et al. 2008:3). But by seeing relations of power and culture as *mediating unequal access* rather than as *constituting contested meanings* of ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’, such critiques remain partial. Instead, I stress the importance of going beyond a delineation of the inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics of development. These dynamics structure access—for example to desirable forms of employment—but as negotiations over meanings and values, inclusion and exclusion do not merely reference a gap between development theory and practice. Rather than assume that social change and empowerment are inherently embedded in the experience of education and can be ‘unlocked’ given the right conditions—as Sen’s framework, most policy as well as popular thinking on education and development do and critiques often reproduce—the varied negotiations of education that I encountered in rural Jaunpur center questions about *what kind of change* is envisioned and experienced. They thus raise fundamental questions about the values and assumptions

underlying liberal projects of education and development (cf. Mehta 1997). To what end does education enable agency and choice? In other words, *what kinds of lives do people have reason to value?*

In order to address such questions, I bring together insights from scholarship on the cultural politics of development and education to examine how school education as a project and process resonates with changing terms of social reproduction in contemporary rural India. As Raissiguier (1995) has pointed out in her analysis of girls of Algerian descent's experiences of schooling in France, the interplay between particular material conditions—for example in the contemporary Indian context between 'growth' associated with economic liberalization and rural crisis—and the 'discursive insistence on the idea of school as opportunity' work to create specific boundaries that frame positions of marginal youth and their communities by others as well as their self-experiences, within and in relation to schools. As part of broader historical projects of domination as well as liberal-democratic governance,<sup>11</sup> school-based education has been identified as a means of conveying particular notions of 'reason' in the guise of universality: "Far from giving expression to capacities that are universal because they presume on so little, education is an initiation into enormously significant specifications of time, place, and social status" (Mehta 1997:69). In India, these specifications are rooted in the institutional and cultural history of the school as an instrument of colonial rule and postcolonial nation-state

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<sup>11</sup> In analyses employing Foucauldian analytics of power, institutions such as schools and prisons are usually categorized as interventionist projects of individualized discipline, in contrast to projects of governance that work at the level of population, to shape general social dispositions and 'the conduct of conduct'. Yet the dividing line between different technologies of power does not seem so clear. Arguably, the particular post-colonial relationships between education and development in India necessitate seeing schooling as a project of discipline and micro-management of individuals, as well as the governmental 'improvement' of populations. I certainly saw both dynamics at work in schools and social discourses about education in the context of my research.

formation and development.<sup>12</sup> Under British colonial rule, school-based education replaced indigenous institutions and traditions of education in many parts of the country (Dharampal 2007), and was central to projects of ‘civilizing’ subjects and maintaining a delicate balance of inclusion and exclusion by selective socialization into Western political and economic cultures (c.f. Kumar 1994; Kumar 2000).

In postcolonial India, Sen’s framing of education as the key means of enabling individual and social development resonates widely. Education has generally been perceived both in official and popular terms as a passport to other, more ‘developed’ and ‘modern’ places and times, and is closely tied to a development imaginary of present and future, of social reproduction and change. Education and development are therefore closely intertwined as policy directives, social discourses and practices. The World Bank goes as far as stating that “education *is* development” (Jeffrey et al. 2008:207). This equation has been commonly articulated in terms of the ideals and prescriptions of modernization and human capital formation, with policies and curricula assuming dualisms such as ‘developed’ and ‘backward’, and aiming to convey skills and attitudes perceived as necessary to achieve material and cultural modernity. Education has also become part of people’s dispositions, reflected in the ubiquity of ‘moral narratives of educated distinction’ (Jeffrey et al. 2008) as a ‘set of ideas about how to think and act’ (Ahearn 2001). My research similarly confirms the multiple ways in which “discourses of formal education have penetrated intimate dimensions of social life” in contemporary India (Ciotti 2006:900).

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<sup>12</sup> Hence modern education, like development (cf. Ludden 1992), in many ways draws on and reproduces imperatives that emphasize the continuities between colonial and post-colonial state formation. Srivastava’s (1998) ethnography of the Doon School is a telling illustration of how the disciplinary practices at Doon School, an elite colonial educational institution in North India, resonate with nation-building and class ideology in post-colonial India.



The cultural production of schooled subjectivities therefore works not just through domination or discipline, but also through everyday experiences and practices, as they resonate with ongoing histories of colonial and postcolonial modernity. Meanings of modernity have been and continue to be highly negotiated in postcolonial India (cf. Chatterjee 1986; Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). Similarly, ideal subject positions of development have changed since the 1950s, as a ‘market ontology’ (Mazarella 2003) of globalization and a post-liberalization economy in India has brought a new legitimacy of the ‘free’ market, conspicuous consumption and private accumulation of resources. Such changes are reflected in popular valorization—particularly through the media but also at times reproduced in academic discourse—of a ‘new’ universal class in urban India: the aspirational middle class (cf. Fernandes 2006). Hence despite historical contestation and variation, assumptions and values of modernization and a ‘market episteme’ (McMichael 2010) persist, though in varied terminology and cultural forms, in visions of progress and development via education today. As I show, ‘modern’, developed and educated subjects are imagined as individuals with skills and attitudes, or human capital, perceived as necessary to effectively engage as producers and consumers in a modern economy, and the cultural capital to attain an idealized, urban, middle-class lifestyle (cf. Donner 2005).

In this context, school education is central to how young people are envisioned and envision themselves as productive individuals engaging in particular worlds of adult work. As such, ‘freedom of an individual to participate in labor markets’ is fundamental to the empowerment potentially enabled by education (cf. Sen 2000); education and employment are

key links in an evolutionary model of change towards "freedom".<sup>13</sup> Yet this link between education, employment and social mobility is complicated by both the fact that education often fails to lead to desirable employment, and that modern education is predicated on and promotes values, skills, aspirations and attitudes which are often at odds with those rooted in a rural agrarian context. Education is thus often a means to marginal inclusion into a modern labor market, hence resulting in the alienating experiences associated with the commodification of labor. The rationale of modern education also works to reproduce the material and cultural devaluation of agriculture, rural space and manual work as 'backward' (cf. Gupta 1998). Such processes reflect and legitimize assumptions about the obsolescence of peasantry and small-scale agrarian production as a part of the trajectory of modern development (cf. McMichael 2008). They also indicate varied dimensions of ongoing 'primitive accumulation' (Marx 1979) of capital through displacement of small-scale agrarian production that has been central to the industrial development paradigm. As Harvey (2003) and others have noted, such processes of "accumulation by dispossession" have deepened through neoliberal strategies of accumulation and governance. As such, the processes through which rural communities are "socially disembedded" (Polanyi 2001) from often largely localized and non-monetary systems of agrarian production and fragilely re-embedded into market-oriented ways of life have therefore been magnified by on the one hand, a valorization of urbanized, middle-class modes of production and consumption, and on the other, on a global reorganization of agrarian production which has displaced subsistence economies worldwide.

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, Sen (2000) suggests that even Marx saw the freedom to participate in labour markets as a benefit of the capitalist system—without recognizing that Marx's key point was about the new, often more subtle, forms of alienation and exploitation that the commodification of human labour entails.

This dissertation seeks to engage with education and social reproduction as about relationship between education and employment *and* between education and agrarian production, as they resonate with material and epistemic “phenomenologies of rural work” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003) that involve particular forms of labor as well as wider referents of moral economies, of individual and collective identity and value. From this perspective, for example, ambiguous evaluations of education in the context of my research may reflect the socio-economic reality that the employment opportunities remain a distant dream for most rural youth with limited education and contacts—i.e. a gap between what development promises and delivers. But it can also indicate responses to the cultural and material devaluation of rural life, and the value that people continue to place on an agrarian moral economy.

Such framings of education and social reproduction thus center questions about the effects of an “educational mission of extra-local proportions” (Levison and Holland 1996:1; cf. Corbett 2007). The significance of ‘educational displacement’ on rural communities worldwide has been captured by popular writers as well as scholars on ‘the rural situation’, who describe education as “tantamount to urbanization of the mind” (Creed and Ching 1997:10). Thus Wallace Stegner, novelist and chronicler of rural western America, summed up his educational experience: “I was educated for the wrong place” (1962:24, quoted in Creed and Ching 1997:10). A key effect of modern schooling that contributes to rural displacement—and which is amplified in the Indian context—is the dichotomy that it reproduces between desirable mental work, and undesirable manual work (Balagopalan 2002, 2008; Kumar 2000; Sarangapani 2003).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> As Willis (1982) points out, the ‘cultural production of the mental/manual division of labor is a corner stone of the class society’ (p. 130).

Modern schooling may therefore be based on different cultural notions of childhood, youth as well as productive adulthood than locally specific systems of knowledge transmission (Levinson and Holland 1996). Analytic categories such as ‘indigenous childhoods’ (Balagopalan 2002) and ‘rural youth’ (Leyshon 2008) have sought recognition for the multiple positions entailed in what it means to be a young person, beyond bourgeois, urban-based ideals and experiences of education and work. Such categories are useful in that they highlight varied experiences as well as persistent inequalities, and how these are shaped as historical and cultural productions that are part of ongoing projects of modernity. They indicate how normative meanings of viability and success/non-viability and failure, are structured by global projects of governance such as education and development, but are also produced through local negotiations of changing social relationships (Cole and Durham 2007; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004). For example, rural dispossession is shaped by global forces, but also locally produced through historically ‘overdetermined environmental subjectivities’ (Jeffrey et al. 2008:204) wherein gender, class and caste prejudice against manual work overlap with developmental visions of appropriate labor promoted by the Indian state, development organizations, corporations and educational institutions. In turn, notions of the successful educated person as engaged in non-manual work have further consequences in a sustenance agrarian economy. Changing evaluations of work shape not just aspirations for the future, but also contemporary generational and gender relationships in a rural agrarian context where involvement in household and field work are central to maintaining social relationships. Educated subject positions therefore resonate as “changes and resistances that occur alongside the rearticulations of work and family relations” (Feldman 1997:47). I therefore locate my analyses of changing terms of social

reproduction in relation to a global, historical project of education-as-development and the discourses and aspirations it produces, as well as changing relationships in villages in Jaunpur.

Methodologically, I therefore use the term ‘education-as-development’ to signal how education is enframed by the rationale of modern development, yet I also seek to counter ‘commonsense’ associations of education with development-as- freedom (cf. Sen 2000). While often posited as a critical alternative to instrumental, market-centered views on development, the ‘development as freedom’ perspective continues to take for granted an abstract and positive relationship between education, employment and development, and elides how they actually work as contested practices with diverse outcomes (Da Costa 2008; Jeffrey et al. 2008; Morarji 2010). As Sarangapani (2003) observes in her ethnography of a government primary school outside Delhi, schooling in this context is widely perceived as necessary for negotiating and even manipulating social realities in place; not as a means of social transformation. In the context of my research, I emphasize the simultaneous valorization of a middle-class social reality—as the one reality worth living and striving for—and the reproduction of dispossessed values of subsistence agrarian production and craft-based manual work. While these tensions are particularly evident in a context such as Jaunpur where mass education is a recent phenomenon, education is arguably central to changing terms of social reproduction in many parts of rural India today. Education is perceived as a key to social mobility and success, particularly as a means to employment in a context of ‘new rurality’ marked by increasing dependence of rural economies on non-agrarian income. As Wadley (2008) notes in a different rural context in north India, education, salaried jobs and urban living are key for upwardly mobile rural families. Education-as-development therefore reproduces a notion of possible inclusion into modernity,

often imagined in terms of urban, middle-class lifestyle and norms; or as a means of successfully adapting to ‘realities’ of the current conjuncture.

In this context, I argue that conceptualizing “education as contradictory resource” (Levinson and Holland 1996:1; Jeffrey et al, 2008:210) captures the lack of correlation between education and employment, but also references the ontological break induced by education-as-development; the socio-cultural norms and values promoted by education and how they resonate with changing conditions of rural life (Vasavi 2006), and local negotiations of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ (Gold 2009; Lukose 2005) varyingly experienced in contemporary South Asia in relation to class, caste, gender, place and age. My study therefore resonates with Jeffrey et al.’s (2008) emphasis on ‘post-educational landscapes as terrains of social and political struggle’, but expands on education as a broader field of power and knowledge, situated locally in the lives of my research subjects. As some of my respondents indicate, a critical examination of education-as-development does not mean discounting the ways in which skills, knowledge and cultural capital associated with modern education may be of value in people’s lives, or the multiple ways in which people desire development (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003). Nor do positive evaluations of education mean that a majority of people in rural Jaunpur do not continue to engage in and value agrarian production. Rather, I emphasize how varied, and often contradictory, experiences and evaluations are sites of tension and negotiation, and that such unevenness is unaccounted for in dominant framings of education-as-development. The co-existence of varying frames of evaluation reflects experiences of modernity in contemporary rural India, where people assess their situations and make choices based on multiple ideologies and needs (Da Costa 2010a; Gold 2009).

I reiterate that education in the context of postcolonial India is a part of uneven material and cultural histories and politics of modernity and development. I therefore ask: how is education *produced, experienced and contested* as a ‘contradictory resource’ in both material and ontological ways? How are subject-positions shaped by development as a disciplinary project, as well as by pragmatic engagements in compulsions and possibilities in the present and for the future? Such questions frame my analysis, and my emphasis on the cultural production of education, development and social reproduction, as dynamics that are as much about access to material resources as they are about definitions of value, or ways of being, *productively and meaningfully*, in the world.

### *Theory: Framing Tensions of Development*

#### *Critical sociology of development*

This section attempts to outline a critical sociology of development that specifies and locates key tensions of development. In this task, world-systems analysis represents one starting point, in that it instigated key critical questions about assumptions of modernization, as they continued to resonate in sociological theories of development. Particularly, the naturalized relationship between social and economic development and autonomous nation-states, and assumptions of development as a universal unfolding of liberal progress were questioned. Here, the critique is based on replacing the nation-state as the unit of analysis of capitalist development with ‘the modern world system’, a historical formation differentiated by uneven forms of incorporation that preclude the possibility of replicating the evolutionary political and economic trajectory of Western states’ development. Development is cast as project/process through which national political modernity is rehearsed on a world scale, offering an illusion of autonomy within the double strictures of state sovereignty and a globally instituted market

(McMichael 2003). As such, development is thereby revealed as a political project to universalize both the model of the liberal citizen state and the nation-centered capitalist economy; both sources of illusory freedoms (Wallerstein 1991).

World analysis thus made significant interventions in understandings of how the reproduction of inequality works through uneven processes of incorporation into a global system of capitalism, and how such processes are legitimized through liberal developmental illusions of economic and political freedom. Yet this framework arguably addresses questions of history, agency and change from a particular perspective. For example, it has been pointed out that by reifying capitalism as ‘the driving force of history’ that determines social, cultural and political forces and experiences, world systems analysis also reproduces Eurocentric meanings of social change (Feldman 2001). Thus, world-changing history is fundamentally derived from political-economic and epistemological processes and projects emanating from 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Ultimately, this theoretical framing both elides the role of specific locations and places in processes of change, and reinscribes epistemological assumptions about power and change entailed in the modernist categories—such as ‘state’ and ‘economy’—that world systems analysts seeks to contest. In doing so, this framework has been critiqued for representing “particular rather than universalist claims, claims that continue to be tied to a developmentalist understanding of progress” (Feldman 2001:367). Unraveling projects and processes through which “universal claims are bound up in particularist assertions” (Stoler and Cooper 1997:3) or, expressed conversely, “the effect of development glossed as universal is created” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003:5) is therefore key to a critical sociology of development.

Critical articulations broadly labeled as ‘post-development’ perspectives articulated dissatisfaction with the continued econo- and Euro-centrism of extant critical scholarship on



development, particularly in the context of a perceived ‘crisis of development’ or ‘development impasse’ of the 1980’s. Emphasis on the interplay of political economy and culture as fields structuring development as a discursive, interventionist project of modernity thus represented a critical intervention (cf. Feldman 2001). Analytically, ‘post-development’ theories stress the discursive power of development—whether through a Foucauldian lens of governmentality or a Gandhian-inspired critique of the ontological violence of colonial modernity—and see alternative material and epistemic possibilities in local systems of knowledge, culture, economy and politics (cf. Banuri 1990; Sachs 1992). The Foucauldian strand, represented particularly by Escobar (1995) and Ferguson (1994), focuses on the discursive construction of development as a post-war project of Western domination, and has contributed to understandings of how particular representations and practices of development work to reproduce and depoliticize global and local inequalities. What post-development perspectives share is that they question not just exclusions from postcolonial, liberal-democratic projects of development but the very terms of this project: the notions of value that it assumes and produces, the meanings of productive work, of cultural identity, of place, and fundamentally, of ‘human nature’. As such, ‘post-perspectives’ on development therefore raise significant questions about that which is taken for granted as ‘natural’ in social discourses, such as the “public appropriation of societal transformation in the name of development” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003:3).

As Baviskar (2007) has pointed out:

Using the principal of governmentality, development seems a discourse that seeks to order identities and practices in the broadest sense, not only creating the ‘Third World’ as a target or object of development, but shaping relationships between ‘men and things’, creating *subjects*, including those who inhabit positions of power... (P. 287).

Hence from this perspective development regimes are recognized as involving not only particular institutional orderings, but also comprehensive reconfigurations of social life. “Creating a new

kind of person” (Cooper and Packard 1997:17) is thus seen as a key aim of modernist development. Such new identities are also categories of distance and difference, of alterity and distinction, as “The flip side of the new person being created was the categorization of the person who had not made the transition: the “indigenous person,” the “traditional” person, the “community”, the “village”, the “local”—generic categories that collapsed the variety and complexity of life in particular locations into a single word” (Cooper and Packard 1997:18). Development therefore makes claims to both an objective ‘reality’ or model of history *and* subjective experiences and individual life trajectories (c.f. Saldana Portillo 2003); “Thus ‘development’ is about the economic position of a nation-state relative to others, but also crucially a form of identity in the postcolonial world” (Gupta 1998:11). Arguably, a key contribution of post-perspectives has therefore been to highlight relationships between objective and subjective dimensions of power as expressed through development.<sup>15</sup>

Yet post-development perspectives have been critiqued for limited understandings of *how* development works in its overlapping objective and subjective dimensions; the histories and meanings at stake, as well as the varied effects as lived experiences. Such perspectives thus tend to present development as an ‘accomplished fact’ within the constrained geo-political space of the post-war world, rather than as part of ongoing struggle and negotiations over meanings of modernity and progress varying expressed in colonial and post-colonial worlds, and in particular times and places. Discursive critiques of the institutional production of the power of development therefore “do not really dispense with the instrumentality of development so much as substitute a set of real, undisclosed or unintended effects for the stated goals of development

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<sup>15</sup> Development thus overlaps with modern capitalist state formation, in how it works through simultaneously individualizing and totalizing claims and categories (cf. Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Morarji 2005).

planning” (Mosse 2005:4). While Foucauldian-inspired analyses of development represent a post-structural critique of more structural framings of the power of development such as world-systems analyses, there are arguably epistemological continuities, evident in assumptions about power and agency. Analyses employing this lens tend to emphasize development as a ‘project of rule’ rather than rule that is ‘accomplished’ as much through contingent and negotiated cultural and social practices as the imposition of disciplinary forms of power (Li 1999; cf. Baviskar 2006; Moore 1999). Power is given a coherence in a different way than world systems analysis, but a similar problem of abstraction makes it “too simple to assert the emergence of a singular development discourse or knowledge-power regime” (Cooper and Packard 1997:10), thereby giving ‘development’ a false sense of coherence and logic.

Similar critical implications as well as limitations apply to post-development perspectives which frame development as a ‘derivative discourse’ (Chatterjee 1986) of colonial modernity. This framing usefully locates the power of development in colonial institutional and historical configurations rather than the post-war conjuncture. Undeniably, recognizing continuities, relationships as well as disjunctures between colonial policies and practices, and post-colonial articulations is central to a critical genealogy of development (Watts 1995; cf. Ludden 1992). Understanding how the ‘unfinished business’ (Burton 1999) of colonial modernity<sup>16</sup> reproduces a ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000) through projects of capitalist development as well as oppositional visions of progress and social organization, is key to a critical analytic of the

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<sup>16</sup> “‘Colonial modernity’ can be grasped as a speculative frame for investigating the infinitely pervasive discursive powers that increasingly connect as key points to the globalizing impulses of capitalism...(it) can also suggest that historical context is not a matter of positively defined, elemental, or discursive units—nation states, stages of development, or civilizations, for instance—but rather a complex field of relationships or threads of material that connect and multiply in space-time and can be surveyed from specific sites” (Barlow (1997:1), quoted in Burton 1999:4).

tensions of development in the contemporary. For example, such an analytic indicates that the modern category of subjectivity<sup>17</sup> and human agency is not a universal, transhistorical formation (Saldana-Portillo 2003:7; cf. Mahmood 2005). Rather, this particular theory of subjectivity is rooted in imperial historical formations, and therefore structured by colonial legacies of differentiation according to race, gender, caste, class etc. and a concept of human improvement towards a modernity envisioned in overcoming premodern forms of community and identity (Saldana Portillo 2003:7; cf. Mehta 1997; Stoler and Cooper 1997). A critical reading of the formation of norms therefore captures “the political struggles in which categories of development are critical—citizenship, agency, privacy, and subjecthood. These political processes around development retread the ground covered by the politicization of categories of colonialism in struggles over identity, resources, and freedom in the postcolony” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003:6). As Saldana Portillo’s (2003) important historical analysis of the mutual imbrications of developmentalist and post-World War II revolutionary visions of progress and liberation in Latin America has illustrated, a common liberal theory of human agency and subjectivity underlies these seemingly oppositional movements. Such analyses thus indicate the continued salience of colonial categories across seemingly varied ideological frameworks, as well as historical and spatial locations.

Politics and practices of imperial rule therefore continue to resonate in the contemporary, yet not, as post-development perspectives tend to emphasize, as an ‘iron-cage’ of closure.

Seeing development as a homogenizing project of discipline and accommodation based on the

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<sup>17</sup> In clarifying what I mean by ‘subjectivity’, I relied on Wong’s (2007) summary of Foucault’s conception of ‘the axes of knowledge, power and ethics’ as domains in which human subjects are constituted. Thus, we are constituted as subjects of our own knowledge, in and through power relationships, and as moral subjects of our actions.

model of the West—as one that “offers self-determination at the same time as it suspends self-definition” (Rist 1997:79)—arguably denies space for the co-existence of multiple forms of association, choices, and values. Hence the tendency for discourses of anti-colonial modernity and anti-development to reproduce objectified notions of historical subjectivity, thereby eliding questions about how abstract values are concretized in people’s lives in varied, contingent and contestable ways (cf. Stoler and Cooper 1997). While colonial categories and dichotomies—such as modernity and tradition—endure, the meanings and boundaries of such categories blur in the context of people’s lives (cf. Dube 2008; Gupta 1998; Klenk 2003).

Thus, limiting analysis to ‘consequences’ without paying specific attention to *how* subjectivities are shaped for people in varying relations of power inherently sidelines the historical agency of social actors who both shape and contest the effects of development (Baviskar 2006). For example, even when dualisms like ‘urban-rural’ or ‘modern-traditional’ appear as ‘ethnographic facts’—as reflected in the popular use of these categories in everyday language in India—these articulations may be analyzed as ‘real’ dualism or progressions, or they can be considered as (often strategic) ‘cultural styles within modernity’ (Ferguson 1999). The latter perspective enables consideration of how ontological categories and material practices of modernity and development have become part of ‘local tongue’ in ways that draw both on dominant meanings and local particularities (cf. Klenk 2003, 2004; Pigg 1992). Such perspectives caution against hasty framings of ‘out-of-the-way places’ and marginality (Tsing 1993), that quickly move from ‘shared practices’ and narratives to totalizing conclusions that seek ‘deep’ meaning in reified categories like ‘alienation’, ‘tradition’, modernity (Ferguson 1999). Such framings may a priori map particular regimes of accumulation and rule onto social experiences and subjectivities (Da Costa 2010b; Stoler and Cooper 1997). As a discourse of

(alternative) historical definition, they therefore preclude questions such as whether people may aspire to modernity without ‘Western’ lives (Gupta 1997), or how people may embrace normative narratives and aspirations without necessarily giving up their efforts and commitments to a better world, and to different visions of life and change.

Hence while analytics of governmentality and coloniality of power are useful for tracing both the objective and subjective claims of ‘development as a project of rule, as a powerful logic and practice’, “...the actual accomplishment of rule owes as much to the understandings and practices worked out in the contingent and compromised space of cultural intimacy as it does to the imposition of development schemes and related forms of disciplinary power” (Li 1999:295; cf. Stoler and Cooper 1997). Thus, while post-perspectives have usefully highlighted that governmental logic and colonial regimes of rule depend on practices of problematization and ‘rendering technical’ social life through abstraction and reification (cf. Li 2007; Mitchell 2002), equal attention needs to be paid to how these have concrete effects and embodied dimensions in historical and social contexts. Technical interventions are also discourses about social organization and value: “Styles of agriculture or tree growing (practical and linguistic) convey social meanings as well as produce successful harvests” (Mosse 2003:333).

As ethnographies of the micro- and cultural politics of development have illustrated, subjects of development—practitioners and assumed beneficiaries—actively experience and negotiate interventions in their everyday lives, in relation to social and spatial categories and forms of subjectivity and material realities (cf. Baviskar 2007; Klenk 2004; Mosse 2005; Pigg 1992). Thus, such perspectives counter segregated and a priori conceptualizations of structural power *and* subjective experience, and illuminate the variegated meanings of developmental ideals in contemporary worlds. Abstract and depoliticized ‘development discourse’ becomes a

part of people's social imaginations and experiences yet does so in highly contingent, negotiated and often unexpected ways (Pigg 1992), in particular historical and geographical contexts (cf. Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). In practice, the cultural politics of development thus becomes evident as contradictory and negotiated processes of social change (cf. Moore 1999; Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). Ethnographic studies of how development is accomplished through cultural and historical processes therefore extend Foucauldian analytics of governmental power with Gramscian notions of hegemony (cf. Baviskar 2006; Li 2007; Moore 1999). Thus, the tensions of development reflect hegemony—‘a state of play, which has to be continually worked on and reconstructed in order to be maintained, and which remains a contradictory conjuncture’ (Hall (1996:45), referenced in Burton 1999).

Thus, this dissertation brings together methodologies that facilitate concrete understandings of how “...development is an ongoing outcome of struggles over meanings and values in social life” (Da Costa 2010b:504; cf. McMichael 2010). Such a framing counters analytics and politics of closure, as “A more careful assessment of development strategies would not only consider the multitude of manners in which it is produced, but also recognize the emancipatory politics it can encourage” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003:32). Historically, “One cannot appreciate the power of the development idea without realizing that the possibility that modern life and improved living standards could be open to all, regardless of race or history of colonial subjugation, was in the 1950's a liberating possibility, eagerly seized by many people in the colonies” (Cooper and Packard 1997:9). This equation of development with liberation should not be naturalized as it is in modernization theories, or, as I argue, in ‘development-as-freedom’, but neither should it simply be dismissed as a form of ‘false consciousness’ as is often implied in post-perspectives on development. Development interventions are enacted both

through particular techno-politics of expertise (Mitchell 2002), as well as moral discourses of improvement and legitimacy that *do* find resonance with the material and cultural terms of people's lives, and that people negotiate with significant creativity and skill (Mosse 2005). Historically, development has thus been appropriated to articulate self-identities, popular counter-claims and mobilizations from a range of ideological perspectives (cf. Cooper 1997; Gupta 1998; Klenk 2003).

As such, recognition of people's varied engagements with and outcomes of development centers questions of *how* development continues to find resonance despite its manifestations as a project of rule. Thus, I argue that attention to the universal, transhistorical deployment of categories and the assumptions and elisions that they signify is crucial to a formulation of a critical sociology of development that raises 'how' questions around the material and moral power of development. This is also necessarily a striving to be able to think about processes of capital accumulation, production and exchange, and their place in social change, while decentering modernist assumptions that naturalize these as part of a coherent and universal logic of progress. To begin to do so requires drawing on analytic frames that account for the power of modern development—as claims that reflect the historical weight of imperial rule and that continue to structure and legitimize inequalities, as well as shape social itineraries and visions of futurity. But it also necessitates frameworks that unsettle the reified power of such representations through attention to the negotiated production and experience of development. Firstly, seeing subjectivity and culture as tools of explanation of multiple experiences of modernity, rather than as outcomes, can counter abstractions that separate categories of social theory from realms of social action and experience (Da Costa 2010b; Feldman 2001). Secondly, by studying and analytically recognizing particular localities and relationships as constitutive of



processes of change rather than spaces where effects of change are felt, we can contribute to representations of localized practices and knowledges imbricated in and contributing to complex histories of modernity and power (cf. Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). Together, such interventions indicate the varying, often historical, practices of mediation and regulation through which objective institutional projects and everyday subjective identities are structured and reproduced.<sup>18</sup>

As Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (2003) have argued:

In the everyday world of livelihood and identity, social struggles and statemaking, signifiers of modernity are drawn very quickly into contentious debates and contested practices. It is in these debates and practices that the stability of such signifiers as progress and reason is called into question as they become imbued with more specific meanings. (P. 48)

The multiplicity of sites and the often contradictory consequences of development projects indicate that conditions that define ‘reality’ and its politics are not always obvious (Moore 1997). Taking normative structural categories of ‘reality’, such as ‘development’, for granted therefore assumes that “subjectivity is fixed and pre-existent in relation to an objective, material world, and that power exists only as an objective force” (Moore 1997:90). Here, I thus contribute to a *critical sociology of development* that incorporates a theory of ‘active human capacity’ (Willis 1982) grounded in live experiences and practices—in the micropolitics of development and livelihood—as well as a reflexive theory of the politics of scholarly practice.

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<sup>18</sup> See for example Feldman (1997) on how the direct role of NGOs and religious institutions in normalizing and legitimizing dominant forms of development and accumulation in Bangladesh blur boundaries between ‘state’ and ‘civil society’ in processes of state formation; Mazzarella (2003) and Lukose (2005) on how notions of a ‘new consumer ontology’ in contemporary India are legitimated and regulated through regional and historical categories of difference and power.

### *Structure: An Outline of this Dissertation*

Through overlapping methodological and theoretical frames—of critical ethnography and sociology of development—this dissertation seeks to examine tensions of development as they manifest as project and process; tensions between mandates for universal inclusion into capitalist modernity, and the reproduction of material and cultural boundaries and inequalities. My focus is on the particular dimensions of such dynamics in contemporary India, as they are expressed through experiences and evaluations of education and social reproduction in a rural mountain context.

In Chapter One, I examine how education-as-development is produced as a ‘contradictory resource’ through disciplinary and governmental practices, as well as active negotiations and compromises on the part of government school teachers and administrators posted in rural schools in Jaunpur. Thus, I locate education in the broader dynamics and cultural politics of development in contemporary India, showing how notions of inclusion and exclusion are structured by and reproduce middle class valorization and rural dispossession in the particular context of Jaunpur. I illustrate how in a neoliberal rendering of modernist narrative of inclusion, education is linked to empowerment through wage employment, as well as a “package” of market-oriented dispensations and liberal notions of subjectivity—choice, rationality, notions of value, production and consumption (cf. Li 2007; Ong 1999)—based on being something else, somewhere else, and how this contributes to notions of rural ‘backwardness’. Teachers reproduce such subject positions and terms of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ presumed to be universally desirable, thereby re-inscribing boundaries between themselves and their rural wards. But as I highlight, teachers also have to negotiate structural limitations to their mandates of improvement as well as the particularities of time and place. Hence, teachers and administrators work through

contradictory outcomes and routine ‘failure’, yet the fundamental legitimacy of the rationale of education-as-development remains unquestioned. Development subjectivities are thus reproduced in their dimensions of inequality and domination, yet *how* such processes happen is not so straight forward.

In this chapter, I thus use the analytic of governmentality to locate the project of school education and its imperatives to ‘develop’ and ‘improve’ rural youth and their communities. I draw on insights from discursive analyses of development to argue that governmental schemes of development often naturalize modernization visions of individual and social change, thereby excluding and marginalizing other meanings and practices while simultaneously de-politicizing terms of intervention. At the same time, I show that while governmental power is often hegemonic—for example seen in the commonsense framing of educational success as employment and spatial and social mobility by school teachers, and conflation of notions of educational success and self-worth by parents and youth—it also works through processes and practices of ‘compromise’ (Li 1999).

Chapter Two examines negotiated *experiences* of education-as-development by parents and youth in villages in Jaunpur. Here, I show that education is experienced as a profoundly ‘contradictory resource’ in relation to uneven outcomes of employment and social mobility, but also in its relationship to the varied material and cultural conditions faced by elders, young women and men in a changing rural moral economy. I indicate the power of the dominant rationale of education-as-development, particularly in relation to notions of desirable and viable productive futures, but also as ‘cultural styles’ (Ferguson 1999), moral narratives and dispositions associated with being educated. Yet a focus on negotiations also indicates how education is experienced through multiple subject-positions, values and demands of social

reproduction. Through analysis of generational and gendered experiences of, and conflicts around, education and change in this rural context, I therefore examine education as a process of uneven socialization into a dominant “development subjectivity” (Gupta 2003:71). Normative educated aspirations arguably contribute to the dispossession of rural futures, yet at times people’s negotiations also challenge modernist notions of education as social good and of agriculture as residual, suggesting the generation of new forms of educated subjectivity. While narratives of success and progress working through modern education *do* condition how people imagine their futures, this chapter illustrates how such imaginations are always actively produced and negotiated.

Finally, Chapter Three is a detailed account and analysis of the life of the Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalaya (SIDH), a non-profit organization working for alternative education and development in Jaunpur. This chapter brings together the key tensions of development within the particular context of contemporary India as well as the broader frame of modernity that my dissertation seeks to critically engage with, highlighting the challenges as well as potentials of struggles against both the material and epistemic terms of ‘education-as-development’. I position SIDH as a ‘critical struggle’ (McMichael 2010) engaged in the contradictions of education-as-development. While this dissertation as a whole seeks to capture and convey contextual meanings of *cultural politics as varied engagement with tensions of development*, this final chapter amplifies the implications of such engagements for praxis. This story highlights questions about what positionings in relation to and against dominant projects enable people to ‘practice a cultural politics’ (Li 2007); and, what kinds of institutional forms and practices of evaluating varied experiences and allegiances support such politics (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006). SIDH’s epistemic interventions provide a basis for critically examining liberal

assumptions underlying education-as-development, such as notions of ‘human nature’, choice and agency. Yet they also illustrate the perseverance of such assumptions in oppositional projects, for example in the dualistic reification of culture and tradition. I show how such positionings effect a politics of closure, reinforced by practical and institutional constraints, limitations in individuals’ lives as well as the overall weight of contradictions in a neo-liberal conjuncture marked by a deepening commoditization of social life. I portray the ultimate ‘failure’ of this intervention, yet my research is also suggestive of openings and possibilities in contradiction and negotiation.

A brief conclusion reiterates my methodological, theoretical and substantive contributions to understandings of the tensions of development as they work through material and cultural power as well as negotiation and compromise. I argue that my examination of education-as-development complicates notions of governmentality and reproduction by focusing on the varying ways in which education is constructed, experienced and struggled with as a ‘contradictory resource’ (Jeffrey et al. 2008). In the context of my research, parents and youth negotiate competing notions of individual and social value and productivity; teachers face contradictions between imperatives of inclusionary development and the maintenance of class- and place-based boundaries, and as an institution, SIDH struggles with material and epistemic terms of education and development. These conflicts and negotiations around social reproduction are shaped by a dominant rationale, but also indicate ‘the ways in which participants in development held ‘education’ accountable to the multiple subject positions they occupied, and to the material politics of their lives” (Klenk 2003:109). I locate these engagements in the context of a rural mountain valley in north India, in which the cultural politics of education and development are necessarily engagements with spatial, political, socio-

economic and cultural markers of ‘backwardness’ and improvement. I thus highlight questions that are not addressed by a dominant regime of education-as-development; for example how experiences of modern education are at same time negotiations of declining rural productivity and cultural identity, and of projects of middle-class formation in contemporary India. Hence, I delineate my substantive contributions to studying dynamics of middle class assertion and rural dispossession; to understandings of rural places as sites of contemporary lives and dilemmas, and to comparative analyses of educational regimes. As I elaborate on in my conclusion, this ethnographic study of education-as-development—or the interplay of education, development and social reproduction—thus captures conjunctural dynamics of ongoing contradictions of modernity, in the lives of teachers, principals, grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, aunts, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, wives, husbands, farmers, pastoralists, householders, wage laborers, migrants, school children and NGO staff in a mountain valley in the foothills of the Himalaya. The Aglar river is a minor tributary of the Yamuna River, and villages in the valley are small hamlets, but neither the plains of north India nor the great Himalayan peaks are very far away.



Figure 7: My room in Kempti, and view over the Aglar valley on a cold February morning when it had snowed on the adjacent hill-tops.

## CHAPTER ONE

### NOT BRIGHT FUTURES: GOVERNMENT SCHOOL TEACHERS AND THE PRODUCTION OF EDUCATION AS A 'CONTRADICTIONARY RESOURCE'

The space (of the school) has an abstract, implicative relationship, not with immediate reality, but with the future...Experts called teachers 'teach' them abstract skills that are believed to be useful later in the adult world. (Sarangapani 2003:245)

...the claim to expertise in optimizing the lives of others is a claim to power, one that merits careful scrutiny. (Li 2007:5)

#### *Introduction*

On a chilly winter morning in Kempty, I met the principal of the local government inter-college (high school) in his office on the school premises. As on numerous other occasions, I found him sitting seemingly idle behind his desk; he was warming his hands in glow of a small electric heater. The principal seemed pleased by my arrival, immediately offering me a chair and calling for a peon to bring tea. We engaged in polite chit-chat until small steaming cups of tea appeared and were consumed. In the conversation that followed, we talked about the fragile future prospects of his students in this rural valley in the foothills of the Indian Himalaya. The principal thus reflected on the value of education for his students:

You can do any job... if you are doing anything, education is a must. For every occupation.... Some of the girls are *very* intelligent, very good. But they are feeling the feedback of their house, their home, is not very good. They are feeling we can't do anything else. We will only do tenth and twelfth and go and do the farming or something, we can't do anything else. And we are encouraging them but they are totally dependent on their parents. I am also trying to motivate them, but they are unable to understand...

The futures of the students, of all students, are not bright. Because from the family ground, they are not aware. We are trying to create awareness in the students, but only a

few students are following. Those which are, are getting benefits. The futures of those children, I am thinking, is good. But the percentage is very low, at the most 5%. Some of these students have been selected in jobs, like the air force, in engineering, and they are also doing post graduation. But the percentage is very low. Those who are following, they are working in the forward sectors.

Here, the principal of the inter-college in Kempty,<sup>19</sup> a semi-rural settlement in Jaunpur block of Tehri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand state in north India, sums up the rationale of education as a means to development: that school-based education is essential for becoming a productive citizen and complete human being; that the role of teachers and administrators is to ‘motivate’ and ‘create awareness’ among rural students and parents who lack understanding of the benefits of education; that girls are intelligent and hardworking but constrained by cultural and familial gender roles; that a future in farming is a sign of educational failure, and educational success equals securing jobs in ‘forward sectors’. Significantly, this vision frames ninety-five percent of the students as having futures that are ‘not bright’.

Embedded in any model of education is a vision of *being* and *becoming*; of subjectivity and personhood in the present and the future. The principal’s statements suggest that in a context where education and development are overlapping projects, such visions are framed in terms of a “development subjectivity” (Gupta 2003:71), where ‘becoming somebody’ and ‘bright futures’ are closely related to ‘becoming developed’ (Klenk 2003), and conversely, ‘failure’ is associated with socio-cultural ‘backwardness’. In this chapter, I examine how government school administrators and teachers in a largely rural context in north India contribute to the production of this hegemonic rationale of education-as-development. I draw on semi-structured interviews

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<sup>19</sup> Kempty government inter-college (high school) includes a junior high school (class six to eight), and high school (class nine to twelve). It serves approximately one hundred households in Kempty, as well as fifteen small villages located on the same side of the Aglar River Valley. In 2007, about seventy-five percent of students attending Kempty inter-college lived in surrounding villages, while the rest resided in Kempty.



and informal conversations with government school staff posted in schools in the Jaunpur block of Tehri Garhwal district, a rural area in the north Indian mountain state of Uttarakhand, as well as participant observation in schools and teacher training workshops in the same region. I show how they implicitly and explicitly reproduce and negotiate the simultaneously inclusionary and boundary-making dynamics of governmental projects of improvement (Li 2007). In other words, this chapter focuses on how education is *produced* as a “contradictory resource” (Levinson and Holland 1996:1; cf. Jeffrey et al. 2008), or how development subjectivities are constituted through disciplinary and governmental practices, as well as through negotiation and compromise (Li 1999). In particular, I focus here on how normative standards of success and aspiration are reproduced, despite the ubiquitous experience of ‘failure’. I argue that these negotiated dynamics resonate with broader cultural politics of development in contemporary India, marked by on the one hand, valorization of identities and aspirations ascribed to an urban middle-class, and on the other hand, ‘rural crisis’ and dispossession.

As a part of the ‘ideological state apparatus’ (Althusser 1971), teachers have an explicit mandate to promote the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with a modernist vision of education as a means for both individual mobility and social progress. Yet as Jeffrey et al. (2008) note in the Indian context, “Notions of progress through education are not only writ large upon the landscape...It is also an idea that *insinuates itself* into people’s everyday actions, thoughts and modes of appreciation, for example through the medium of the formal, informal and hidden curriculum within schools...” (p. 63). The mooring of schooling in a dominant ‘development regime’ (Ludden 1992) is therefore “... both shaped by state laws, curriculum policies, employment practices, funding, architecture, and so on, and it is maintained by students, teachers, and parents in their everyday routines and interactions” (Rousmanierre et al. 1997:7).

In the first substantive section of this chapter, I demonstrate how government school staff articulate their perceived mandate to improve and develop their wards, and explicitly and implicitly concretize these universal ideals in dominant (middle class, urban) idioms of economic and cultural success. I also show how teachers themselves often embody dominant notions of what it means to ‘become somebody’, and evaluate knowledge, skills and educational success based on their perceived relationships to ‘going out’ into future employment in ‘forward sectors’, or social mobility from rural spaces and agrarian livelihoods. Here, mimicry is the central strategy of this rationale of education-as-development (Gupta 1998). Teachers represent the terms of emulation in their middle-class lifestyles and values, their embodiment of success through authority as guardians of seemingly unmarked, universalized forms of relevant knowledge, their status as state representatives, and their attainment of much-coveted stable employment. Their very location in a political and cultural economy of development contributes to the reproduction of normative notions of work, of desirable behavior, appearance and standards of success.

Yet in reinscribing notions of rural young people and their communities as ‘backward’ and, as the Kempty high school principal stressed, largely destined to failure, administrators and teachers limit their ability to affect development in the region. Hence I show how they also have to negotiate contradictions between their mandate and the effects of articulating distinction through tropes of alterity and discipline, as well as the promotion of knowledge and values which are at odds with the material and cultural context in which they work. Teachers draw on a governmental logic of improvement (Li 2007) but they also culturally ‘work’ to reproduce and legitimize particular material and cultural meanings of development through their behavior and interactions. I therefore highlight contradictions between the inclusionary mandate of education-

for-development, and both material and ontological boundary-making practices reproducing teachers' distinction and, for rural students and their communities, 'futures that are not bright'. As such, failure and compromise are produced by the rationale and practice of education-as-development, suggesting how limits of government are contained in the inherent elisions, erasures and exclusions of practices of improvement (Li 2007). Throughout this chapter, I attempt to highlight how contradictory impulses and inherent limitations and exclusions are reproduced as well as negotiated by teachers and school administrators.

In the second section, I present detailed observations from a public meeting between the principal, teachers, and parents and students of class ten and twelve (years in which external board exams are taken) at the local inter-college (high school), located in the semi-rural settlement of Kempty. Here, I examine the logics and structures of interactions between principals, teachers, parents and students in a micro-context, and how they reflect broader tensions and negotiations of development. The meeting was explicitly framed by the principal in terms of participatory rhetoric, as an effort to uncover reasons for and solutions to widespread exam failure rates among students. As such, the focus and tone of the meeting indicate the compulsion on the part of the school principal in particular to produce higher exam results as this is a key indicator of success and legitimacy in the eyes of the state as well as the local community. In this context, principals and teachers negotiate between the need to achieve results and assumptions about the entrenched 'backwardness' of rural students and their families and communities: they consistently stress that they have low expectations from rural students, whose material and cultural 'problems' work against educational success. Hence the meeting appears largely as a disciplinary exercise to locate problems, or causes of failure, within students and parents, focusing particularly on their routines and cultural habitus. I show how an emphasis is

placed on cultivating middle class norms of behavior and value as a means to educational success. My analysis emphasizes that the politics of exclusion and failure are elided through a focus on locating problems, and how middle class regimes of morality and success are naturalized as a universal norm in ways which evade their particularity (cf. Liechty 2003), as well as their role in the ‘dispossession of rural futures’ (Da Costa 2010a).

I conclude by reiterating my theoretical contributions to understandings of the tensions of development as they work through material and cultural power as well as negotiation and compromise. Both school education and development have been significantly studied as projects and processes through which material and cultural terms of inequality are reproduced, through disciplinary practices as well as negotiation and compromise (cf. Willis 1977). Yet my contribution is to highlight the particular dynamics of schooling-as-development in the context of contemporary India, as a disciplinary regime that works through micro-practices of discipline and differentiation, as well as governmental discourses, to delineate both material and ontological boundaries of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in relation to class and space.

### *Government School Teachers and the Rationale of Education-as-Development*

#### *Mandates of improvement, middle class habitus and rural backwardness*

Upon hearing that my research had to do with education and development, a village government primary school teacher responded that Jaunpur was a good choice as research site, as it has been “one of the most backward areas”. Another government school teacher added that ‘development is happening here, slowly slowly...’. A key referent of such perceptions of backwardness and progress is the state of education facilities. Twenty years ago, there were few primary schools in the scattered villages of Jaunpur, teacher absenteeism was common, and children had to trek long distances to get to a school. Basic education was not a mass experience.

However, the formation of the new hill state of Uttarakhand brought increased development funding and intervention in the region, including a significant improvement in government school facilities. At the time of my research (2006-2008), several villages had primary schools, as well as middle-schools within fair proximity, and all the government schools which I visited seemed to be operating with some degree of regularity. Each side of the valley had one government inter-college. The fact that school-based education, at least up to class five and increasingly class ten or twelve and even college, has become a part of daily life for communities in the Aglar valley in the last ten years, was perceived as a key indicator of increased ‘development’ of the region.

In this context, teachers and administrators posted in government schools in Jaunpur see themselves as key agents of development. They are generally legitimated in this mandate based on their cultural capital and political status. Teachers hold much-coveted, stable, well-paid and respected jobs, usually reside in and commute from urban areas, send their children to private schools, and generally embody middle class lifestyles. As the largest cadre of government officials in the state, school staff are also influential local representatives of the state apparatus, performing multiple roles beyond their appointed schools. For example, in preparation for state-level elections, I found teachers busy distributing voter ID cards to villagers, and later monitoring elections. They also routinely conduct government duties such as administering household surveys, supervising pulse polio vaccination drives, delivering post etc. Many have positions in village *panchayats* (local governance bodies), and oversee distribution of community development funds from the state government.<sup>20</sup> Hence school staff maintain extensive roles as

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<sup>20</sup> Ong’s (1987) description of the role of teachers in rural Malaysia is very similar: "In almost daily contact with students, teachers (guru) are highly regarded for their learning, their kerajaan (shorthand for

agents of the developmental state, and manage schools and teach classes as part of this broader directive. At the same time, materially and culturally they often represent an assertive ‘new’ Indian middle-class (cf. Fernandes 2006).

Teachers such as Sarita, the headmistress of Bhatoli village government primary school, illustrate this sense of alterity and how it frames interventions in rural communities through schools. Bhatoli is a village located about eight kilometers from Kempty, just off a paved road. The school is some distance from the road, at the far end of the village, and is surrounded by fields. Sarita commutes daily to the school from her home in Dehradun, the nearest city, about 45 km away by road, and an arduous hour-and-a-half to two hour ride in a jeep-taxi or bus along a curvy mountain road. Sarita was in her mid thirties, and on my visits to the school along with my research assistant, I always found her similarly dressed in colorful ironed and starched cotton *salwaar-khameez* "suits" with tight *churidar* pants, and heeled sandals. She wore lipstick as well as jewelry, and her hair loose and cut in a shoulder-length layered style. Given her long commute, Sarita often arrived at the school after classes began; on one occasion when we came before her, saw her rush in toting a handbag and several plastic carry bags and folders. After going through some files with a teacher, she told us about her involvement in the teacher’s union, and the position she was contesting for in upcoming elections. Sarita is also the treasurer of the village panchayat, and stressed the difficulty she had experienced in working with the local community due to ‘corruption and lack of interest’. She paused to answer her cell phone several

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government employment) stamp, and orientation to Malay society. They set local standards for aspiring kempung boys and girls, the majority of whom seek career paths out of agricultural work. Gurus not only display the accoutrements of urban lifestyle such as cars, plastic sheathed furniture, electronic gadgets, and expensive clothes, but they also speak in authoritative tones about Malay problems, sprinkling their speeches with technical terms and English phrases...Situating in government offices and public institutions, guru and officials are strategic nodes in the bureaucratic system linking rural Malays to the national society" (p. 79).

times during our conversation. Overall, Sarita's urbane, 'smart' clothing and appearance,<sup>21</sup> her involvement in union and village politics, her comments about the disinterest and dishonesty of local village leaders, and her confident and busy mannerism embody the identity of a professional, educated middle-class career woman and distinguish her from the rural context in which she works.

In my interactions with government school teachers, I found that they repeatedly articulated their mandate as being to improve or 'bring forward' rural children—'*baccho ko aage badhaana hai*'—whom they see "like raw clay, *katchi mitti*, they can be shaped, and come to school to be shaped".<sup>22</sup> As scholars have illustrated, such representations reproduce particular visions of being modern; 'building on a clean slate' are central to Scott's notion of 'high modern schemes' and Foucault's 'liberal arts of governance' (Li 2005). Framed by the development imperative, teaching is therefore seen as being as much about conveying institutionalized knowledge and skills, as it is about inculcating capacities and conduct associated with a 'development subjectivity' (Gupta 2003:71). Such identities associated with being 'developed' are based on an abstract ideal, but are also modeled by teachers in ways which distinguish them from the rural communities in which they work. A local young man employed as a teacher's assistant in a government primary school near his village commented on the differences that mark teachers at the inter-college level from their students, saying that "The teachers there are

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<sup>21</sup> C.f. Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003); Liechty (2003); Jeffrey et al. (2008); Tarlo (1996) and Wadley (2008) among others on how clothing expresses modernity and educated distinction and mobility in South Asia. Liechty (2003:110) describes how a "fashion *sense*", or "the knowledge of how to be fashioned" is acquired and acculturated as a distinguishing middle class sensibility that requires disposable income but also helps naturalize middle class privilege.

<sup>22</sup> In her research on girls' education elsewhere in rural north India, Gold (2002:97) noted that teachers routinely asked students to "forget" everything that they had in their minds before coming to school, "to erase them like blank slates".

very different from the kids, their dress, behavior, eating is all distinct”. In this context, I argue that government teachers in rural schools therefore play a key role in producing and maintaining standards of being—implicitly by embodying the habitus of an ideal middle class, as well as explicitly, by articulating a modernist rationale of education-as-development. This rationale invokes the ‘problem’ of ‘backward’ or irrelevant local knowledge and experience—or “...an image of a child in school as a child with no history, only a future” (Balagopalan 2005:86). The ‘solution’ is a future envisioned in middle-class, urbanized economic and social terms, through interventions such as schooling that in turn necessitate the creation and maintenance of boundaries between teachers and those to be developed (Li 2007).



Figure 8: Teachers from government schools in the valley, attending a conference at SIDH

### *Negotiating the effects of difference*

While teachers like Sarita explicitly and implicitly express particular middle-class visions of education and development, teachers are not simply reproducing the interests of their class. Rather, government school teachers provide a lens on the negotiated ‘accomplishment of rule’



(Li 1999). In all my interactions with government school teachers, I found that the majority were keen to recount the ‘problems’ which they faced in their work. Most teachers highlighted practical difficulties like hardships of rural postings (especially perceived by women, who constitute the majority of primary school teachers); difficulties managing multiple classes in single-teacher schools or in schools where one teacher was routinely absent, and inability to focus on teaching due to burdens of non-school duties as well as non-teaching duties like managing midday meals and required register data. A local *shiksha mitr* (teacher’s assistant) told me that each school has to manage at least fifty registers; I too had noted the ubiquitous stacks of rectangular register books piled high in the offices of schools and education departments. Female teachers at times spoke of experiencing conflicts with family responsibilities, such as their own children being left to tuitions and grandparents, and the difficulties of having to handle all household responsibilities despite being working professionals alongside their husbands. Hence a female teacher in Lagwalgaon primary school, who managed class one through five plus a *kaccha ek* (informal class one for younger children who come to school but are not registered students) alone since the head teacher of the school was suffering from cancer and permanently absent yet being marked as ‘present’ and collecting a salary, remarked that while both she and her husband were school teachers, ‘I am the one who has to get up and make tea’. Another female teacher who was contesting in a teacher union election subsequently reported that she had lost the election; she said that the union elections were a rowdy, male-dominated affair with drinking etc. going on, and very few female teachers voted or participated. Similarly, teachers spoke of challenges that they faced in working with rural parents and communities whom they saw as lacking understanding of the importance of education as well as interest in improving school facilities etc. unless ‘there is money to be

made'. A few teachers reflected on the moral degradation, or 'lack of respect', that they felt pervades the government system. Rajesh, a particularly disillusioned primary school teacher (who was the only teacher I met who was living in the village where he was teaching along with his family) argued that:

Ninety-five percent think that their children will get jobs after studying. But I have seen the *naukri-wallah* system (of government service). You will get money, maybe power, but *not* respect. It is a system of restrictions, lost freedom... If we want *naukri*, we should at least examine why. I really don't want kids to get into *naukri-ki-chakkar* (the hunt for government jobs) without any information. The system is *lachaar*, broken, nothing can come out of it.

In teachers' own narratives, they therefore suggested multiple challenges and negotiations that they face in relation to the state, local communities where they work, as well as their own communities and families. These negotiations suggest that while teachers occupy roles of state authority and middle-class distinction, their subjective experiences of these positions may often be fragile and anxiety-ridden. Hence, my emphasis here on the role of school teachers in reproducing systemic inequalities is thus not intended to deny such variegated experiences and identities. Rather, my attention is foremost on the *effect* of teachers' public positioning, and how they negotiate multiple and seemingly contradictory goals in relation to the rural communities in which they work. For example, the principal of the Kempt high school told me that:

Many teachers are not belonging to this area, so they are not understanding. They are just coming and teaching in the classroom, and going back. *A barrier is lying between the students and the teachers*. Because they are not aware of the cultures, they are not aware of the problems of the children, because the students are facing so many problems. Like financially, culturally, many problems they are facing. But the teachers are focused only on studies. They are coming, it is my duty, I'll do it, and going back. They are not worried about their problems.

Here, the spatial and cultural distance between teachers and students is recognized as countering the inclusionary mandates of education-as-development. Hence the principal's

observations signal a broader recognition of a key obstacle to the mandate of development through education, namely the limited relevance of the government schooling system for marginal communities. Such disjuncture has been highlighted repeatedly as a key policy concern by critical educational scholars and officials in India (cf. Clarke 1997; Kumar 2006; PROBE 1999; Rampal 2002).<sup>23</sup> Contemporary reform efforts continue to reflect such concerns, invoking for example the need for broader participation in the construction of curriculum and school knowledge (National Council for Educational Research and Training 2005). In talking to teachers and education officials such as the principal of Kempty inter-college, I found that there is some awareness of lack of relevance and general failings of the school system to produce the idealized outcomes for a majority of students in the region, and, as the above comments by the principal suggest, educators do feel some compulsion to address these issues.

Yet while teachers and administrators have to negotiate notions of the school as a limited site of change and mobility for individual students and their communities, they adopt reformist discourse in ways that arguably reproduce boundaries of differentiation and exclusion. For example, by focusing on the *'problems of the children'*, the principal's comments illustrate how such efforts detract from how differentiation on the part of teachers is in fact cultivated and produced, and how it affects social relationships. As such, the production and reproduction of this sense of alterity is a key trope of development projects (cf. Cooper and Packard 1997; Gupta 1998). Subject positions valorized as "developed"—such as those commonly ascribed to teachers

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<sup>23</sup> For example, it has been noted how school textbooks tend to represent rural India in terms of simplistic generalizations about the needs of the rural poor to 'develop', or in terms of nostalgic, romanticized images of idyllic village-India (Rampal 2002). In lessons which center around a meeting between an urban and rural child (often based on the former making a trip 'back' to the village), "...the rural child is offered unrealistic platitudes but never allowed to get an edge over his/her urban privileged counter-part" (Rampal 2002:157).

and which mark them as distant in varying ways from the communities in which they work—are therefore often articulated comparatively, working through anxieties about "backwardness", in terms of lifestyle and forms of work, as well as caste, class, generational and gender identities (cf. Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003; Jeffrey et al. 2008; Klenk 2004; Lukose 2005). Rather than recognizing such processes as integral to the dynamics of development, the principal here naturalizes the terms of difference as 'problems' of his students—which he describes as both 'financial and cultural', i.e. implying 'poverty and backwardness'.



Figure 9: Managing multi-class teaching at Lagwalgaon government primary school.

Teachers and school administrators working in schools in Jaunpur at times paradoxically expressed awareness that education is too narrowly focused on information-based syllabi, exams, degrees and employment, and fails to both foster a holistic development of children and to promote employment opportunities of youth. For example, in the course of our interview with Sarita, the headmistress in Bhatoli village primary school, she repeatedly used terms such as 'comprehensive development' and development of 'character' and 'behavior' of students. She told us that "Children should gain understanding, not just follow the syllabus for good results;

they should also get all-round development, like physical, mental, character... If they study well and then behave badly with their parents this is not good, it should be in all fields, comprehensive. They should learn something besides what is taught in the syllabus". Yet in further querying what kinds of characteristics, behaviors and skills were seen as desirable, and how teachers try to instill these qualities in their students, such concerns signal *particular* notions of desirable educated subjects. From Sarita, I got a sense of this when she talked about her relationships with former students. She told me that many of her students in the school where she used to teach remember her fondly because she 'makes extra effort'. She went on: "I met some ex-students in Delhi, they are big and married now. English was not taught then, and I thought English was very necessary for them for when they would go out, so I taught them "123", "ABC" and some things like that. Like now I teach them things like 'may I come in'". She equates children's character development with the ability to present themselves as having some exposure to English and to be able to exhibit polite behaviors in English, and assumes these to be of use in a future 'when they go out' to places like Delhi.

The importance of conveying knowledge and behavior for a future when students will 'go out', or leave their villages, was stressed again by Sarita when we talked about changes being made in curriculum since the creation of the new state of Uttarakhand (in particular, about the insertion of 'local knowledge'). She said that "everyday there are changes to the curriculum by SCERT,<sup>24</sup> last year they made changes and now they are making changes again. On what basis I don't know. They have added lessons about our own area. This is good, but I also feel that they

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<sup>24</sup> The State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) are state-based institutions affiliated with the central National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and are involved in curriculum and textbook design. At the time of my research, SCERT in Uttarakhand was in the process of revising textbooks for the new state, some had been released while others were still in progress.

should have kept some of the lessons that have been taken out because they also need to know about other things when they go outside. For example about the Taj Mahal, they also need this kind of knowledge when they are going out".

In my interactions with Sarita, I felt that she expressed genuine concern for the welfare of the students in her school. Yet her concern articulates a particular vision of well-being and improvement for her wards: she feels that the syllabus limits students' potentials towards becoming 'developed', in terms of successfully inhabiting other, 'outside' worlds. She therefore assumes a universalized vision of what is "relevant", based on knowledge and skills seemingly 'unmarked' by specificities of time and place. Hence by implicitly and explicitly embodying and enacting identities that distinguish them from the local communities where they serve, and by stressing the pedagogical importance of knowledge and ways of being for future lives outside of rural agrarian locales, teachers like Sarita contribute to the production of a particular "type of culture of educated distinction" (Jeffrey et al. 2008:65) based on being something else, somewhere else. Observing similar processes in rural Nova Scotia, Canada, Corbett (2007) has shown how school education serves as a key disciplinary force in the project of modernizing rural people and places by emphasizing identities and places other than their own. As Mitchell (1988) has argued more generally, a key effect of modern representational practices is the notion that 'the real world is somewhere else', creating discrepancies that are a source of anxieties as well as aspirations. A model of education for future export is key to such processes, as "Place attachment and local knowledge are precisely what many rural educators struggle to

subvert...and what is often called ‘broadening the horizons’ of rural children and youth" (Corbett 2007:10).<sup>25</sup>



Figure 10: Government school teachers from the valley looking at an exhibit on villages in Jaunpur on the SIDH campus.

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<sup>25</sup> A model of ‘*education for export*’ (Vinish Gupta, personal communication) pervades the Indian educational system, highlighting how imbricated education is with notions of social and spatial mobility and displacement. In his own case, Vinish Gupta (now aged forty, educated in upper middle class urban schools and elite higher education institutions) recounts that most of his peers have emigrated. In Jaunpur, teachers often shared with me their own experiences and visions of mobility, which included moves from low-paying private sector jobs to government service, educating their own children in private schools, and future aspirations to ‘go abroad’. Perceiving me as a ‘foreigner’, many government school teachers stressed particularly their aspirations to go abroad. The principal of the Kempty inter-college, with whom my research associate had suggested I speak in English as he would take me ‘more seriously’, reported on my second meeting with him that he had told his son about me, and invited me to visit them in his home in Dehradun as his son was excited about the prospect of meeting or talking to a foreigner. I replied that I hoped he wouldn’t be too disappointed, as I don’t feel like I fit the bill too well. But it turned out that what mattered was that I lived in America. I asked him his son’s age, expecting that he was a teenager with dreams of foreign studies and migration, and was taken aback when I was told that he was six years old! Samta, a lecturer in Hindi at the Kempty inter-college told me about a neighbour’s son who was working in the US as an engineer, and was currently home on a visit. She said that he was making good money but was miserable there, missing his family and being missed. ‘But’, she added, “*aajkal yeh craze hai, baahr jaane ke liye*”; these days this is the ‘craze’, to go abroad. Such narratives indicate both the compulsions and anxieties that are integral to the achievement and maintenance of middle-class status and lives (cf. Liechty 2003).

Despite the often good intentions, and sometimes substantial efforts, of government school educators, I saw repeatedly how normative assumptions limited seemingly critical insights and reformist interventions.<sup>26</sup> For example, the principal at the Kempty inter-college criticized rural parents for their limited association of education with jobs, arguing passionately that:

Students are not just studying to get a job, but to get knowledge, to understand their surroundings, the world. But parents associate education with jobs, don't understand that education is also to get knowledge, and to be able to do something more broadly.... Parents are not aware of the importance of education. They ask 'what is the use of education, we will not get the job'. So I want to know, is education only for jobs? No, it is wrong thinking of the parents. Education is not only for job purposes.

Here the principal seems to stress a 'human development' perspective, or a moral narrative, where education is necessary for the intrinsic benefits it provides, beyond the instrumental goals of employment or economic gain (c.f. Dreze and Sen 1995; Sen 2000). He chastises parents for their inability to understand this, and for their narrow focus on the outcome of employment. At the same time, as his opening quote at the beginning of this chapter indicates, he clearly associates educational success with 'good jobs' in 'forward sectors'. In suggesting that parents should recognize the moral value of education beyond jobs, the principal is arguably offering these rural communities a compromised substitute for the *real* material and economic values of educational success which he recognizes as being beyond most of their reach. As Willis (1977) has pointed out, teachers' focus on the benefits of education for the moral improvement of working class students, or notions of 'attitudes' and especially of 'right attitudes, "...should

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<sup>26</sup> As has been recognized by scholars commenting on reform efforts in Indian school textbooks, there is 'tremendous resistance' to really addressing questions of 'relevance and life-orientation' of textbooks among Indian state educational experts, as relevance cannot be addressed without recognizing the dominant influence of urban middle class experiences, visions and values in the construction of school-knowledge and texts (Rampal 2002)—and I would add, the developmental framing of the project of schooling.



always warn us of a mystificatory transmutation of basic exchange relationships into illusory, ideal ones” (p. 69), as these are moves which leave the basic relationships and terms of exchange unquestioned. Along the same lines, Shobhan, my research assistant, argued that ‘it is fine for middle-class state employees to argue that education is not just for employment, but for rural communities whose traditional livelihood options are being closed-off through modernist interventions such as education, *what else would education be for?*’

Arguably, Willis’ warning and Shobhan’s question highlight a key tension of liberal development and modernity, here examined through school education and in the historical conjuncture of contemporary India: a simultaneous process of delineating a vision of desirable ‘reality’, and negotiating the limited terms of inclusion in this material and ontological vision (cf. Mehta 1997). For example, Sarita’s interventions to teach her wards simple English phrases and mannerisms not covered by the syllabus simultaneously produce a particular vision of educated distinction, *and* indicate a recognition of the inadequacy of schooling as a passport to other, more developed worlds and lives for young people in Bhatoli and other mountain villages. Schooling is necessary, but given their ‘backward’ positions and the kind of education they receive, it is insufficient to gain the cultural capital, or middle-class “linguistic and aesthetic knowledge and respectability” (Fernandes 2006:34). While the rationale of education-as-development is one of inclusion based on universal capacities provided through schooling, implicit boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are based on specific details of disposition, manners, dress, cultural codes and ways of being (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Mehta 1997; Stoler and Cooper 1997). Hence, of actual ‘relevance’ are the skills and dispositions that can get one to the ‘reality’ worth living. At the same time, generalized notions of moral improvement are offered as the fundamental ‘relevance’ of education given the fact that schooling is unlikely (due to problems and

shortcomings on the part of syllabus, students' attitudes, etc.) to get these rural youth to the desired reality. In other words, terms of 'relevance' are at the same time universal and particular, inclusionary and exclusionary. By pertaining to other places and values, as well as universalized moral values, economic and ontological boundaries and inequalities are reproduced and legitimized, thus simultaneously evading the politics involved. As such, "The details structure the outcome without of necessity violating the presumed inclusionary vision" (Mehta 1999:62).

Hence, I have argued that as 'trustees' of development but also as subjects occupying particular positions of power (as state representatives as well as members of an urbanized middle class), teachers reinforce their own developed distinction through tropes of alterity and discipline in ways which limits their ability to affect 'development' in a region which remains spatially and culturally defined by rurality and agriculture. School teachers and administrators negotiate such seemingly contradictory dynamics of improvement by articulating reformist rhetoric and broader mandates of schooling and development. Such discourses thus signal the kinds of negotiations that teachers and administrators engage in—often unconsciously—as a part of reproducing education as a 'contradictory resource' that offers limited opportunities for material and cultural mobility and inclusion into 'bright futures'. Yet as I have shown here, and examine in greater detail below, teachers and administrators tend to negotiate the contradictions of their mandate through practices of problematization and articulating a broadened field of intervention in ways which elide the material and cultural politics of 'success' and 'failure'. Such practices highlight how 'failure' in development discourse is often taken as indicative of the need for more, better-targeted, or reformed intervention rather than raising fundamental questions about the terms of

success and failure, or of material and epistemic inequalities and exclusions which produce such outcomes (cf. Ferguson 1994).

### *Negotiating and Reproducing Failure*

#### *Participatory disciplining*

When the principal of the Kempty inter-college invited me to attend a meeting with class ten and twelve parents, he told me that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the high failure rate of students on the recent prep-exam for the upcoming state board examinations taken in these years. In his invitation, he stressed repeatedly that this was to be a 'discussion' between students, teachers and parents, 'to figure out where the problems lie'. The meeting was scheduled for eleven o'clock on a crisp winter morning, and I arrived at the school at that time. Some chairs and stools were set up for the meeting outside on the flat roof in front of the school building. When I arrived, there were two men, whom I later learned were parents, sitting on the roof taking in the warming winter morning sun. At eleven thirty a few more male parents were straggling in. A senior teacher had also come out of the building, and chastised them for being late, saying that he had sent two letters and posted an announcement in Kempty, and since twenty five percent of students were from Kempty he expected people to see it. Each time a parent arrived, this reprimand was repeated.

The principal came out from his office just after eleven thirty. In the meantime students had been summoned, and told to sit on the ground in two areas; class twelve behind the desk and chairs set up for the principal and teachers, and class ten on the side. The principal sat behind a desk facing the parents. Five or six teachers also came and sat in a row alongside the principal. The principal opened the meeting by again stating that they were gathered to have a discussion between the parents, teachers and children to figure out why students are failing. He repeated this

a few times: ‘To figure this out, we also need to talk to the children. We need to hear what their problems are before searching for solutions’. He also announced that ‘the government has decided that there will be a pre-board exam in January, and if the results are not satisfactory, students will not sit for the boards, there is no point’. He reiterated that it was the government that had decided on this. Addressing the parents, he stressed that ‘now that the students have holidays, they can prepare, take tuitions—you should make them study’. When a parent objected that there were no extra tuitions available in Kempty, the principal replied that “if the syllabus is completed why can’t they get thirty-three percent? Why? More failed this time. Some weakness is there. We need to figure this out to find solutions. They should be able to get thirty-three percent from just studying. We are not expecting them to get ninety percent, just passing marks... Only eight out of thirty-five students in class ten passed in Hindi. How can we have this problem?”

In the Indian education system, the examination arguably plays a key role as a pedagogic as well as regulatory tool (cf. Kumar 2000; Sarangapani 2003). Exam results are not only a basis for student evaluation; they are the main qualification for success in future lives of students, and a central indicator for state and community evaluations of a school and its staff. As Foucault (1995) has pointed out, the examination has thus historically worked as a disciplinary technology of the school environment in general: "At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected" (p. 185). In a context where education is framed by a modernist vision of development, the disciplinary power of the examination thus works to broadly regulate behavior and notions of success and failure. For example, the purpose and legitimacy of teaching becomes narrowly objectified, as a ‘good’ school—and hence also its principal and teachers, and

the pedagogy imparted—is one which achieves high exam scores and pass rates. At the same time, such schooled notions of discipline and achievement reverberate as social norms of behavior and value. As Sarangapani (2003) observed in the context of a government primary school outside Delhi, “The discipline that coercively made students conscious of meeting different standards seemed to give the school its agency in secondary socialisation” (p. 78). The examination is therefore more than a basis for evaluation of students’ comprehension of school subjects; it is a practice through which particular notions of human education, purpose and value—or educated subjectivity—are objectified.

The winter-morning meeting in Kempty was in a sense a public recognition of the fact that education is a ‘contradictory resource’, as a majority of students in this rural high-school are ‘failures’ according to the external standards of state examinations. While pass-rates are slightly higher on actual state board exams, high fail and repeat rates are endemic. ‘Tenth-fail’ is a commonly evoked educational qualification among youth in the region, and in India in general (cf. Kumar 2006). In this context, this meeting is also a reflection of how a principal and teachers negotiate a key mandate and basis of their legitimacy, in relation to broader mandates such as overall student development, but also in relation to contextual constraints. Here, the principal frames the meeting in participatory rhetoric: as a ‘discussion between teachers, parents and students’, ‘to figure out solutions’, and ‘find out what is really going on’. Yet at the same time, he sets the stage for the meeting as being about discipline and authority. Spatially, the meeting’s physical arrangement resembled a court hearing, with the principal and teachers as ‘judges’, the parents as jury and the students as suspects seated on the floor. In varying ways, the principal’s opening comments expressed disciplining authority: by reprimanding the parents for being late, by pointing out that the government was the source of decisions about exams, by indicating

‘weakness’ in the students and responsibility of parents to ‘make them study’, and by establishing low overall expectations from rural students: ‘We are not expecting them to get ninety percent, just passing marks...’ As such, this meeting is suggestive for thinking about how ‘failure’ may be negotiated through a participatory rhetoric which, while it may very well express sincerity and care on the part of individuals involved, works to identify and hence incorporate problems into broader discourses and practices of development. It thus illustrates how discipline and compromise are both intentionally deployed and unconsciously exercised in the accomplishment of ‘development’ (Li 1999).

### *Students as the problem*

The meeting proceeded with (all-male) parents present asking about individual children’s results—either their own or those related to them. A father asked about his two sons’ results. The exam results were written by subject on large loose pieces of ledger paper that looked like they had been torn out of a register book. The senior teacher consulted these, and responded that one had failed the 12th exam. In this manner, a few students’ exam results were read out publicly. The principal then intervened and indicated the need to ask the students about their results: “From inside the children only, we need to find out what is happening. We need to find out what is happening in their minds”. Henceforth students’ whose exam results were being discussed were told to come and stand next to the principal’s desk. An adolescent male student was called up and asked why he had scored five out of fifty in English. He responded that he didn’t understand grammar. The principal asked if he didn’t understand from before, which he nodded a ‘yes’ to. The principal then asked him pointedly “Why didn’t you tell anyone?” Without waiting for an answer, he proceeded to draw a broader lesson from this boy’s example, addressing all the students:

If you are not understanding, why don't you tell me? We need to understand what the problem is in order to find a solution. If I go to the doctor and say I have this problem, for example fever, they can treat it. If you don't tell the doctor what your problem is, he can't do anything. If you ask for medicine, he first will ask you what your problem is. What can we do if you don't tell us?

A parent quietly tried to interject that students feel embarrassed to ask teachers when they don't understand something in class—seemingly pointing towards the distance that separates teachers and students as a 'problem'. Yet the same man immediately nullified this, stating that "This is the weakness of the children". Among teachers and parents, the conclusion was that 'the problem of lack of communication' was the fault of students, as a teacher ended the discussion by stating categorically "We like those who ask the most questions the best". Through this exercise of examining the 'minds' of students, students themselves were identified as the main problem behind their own failure. Hence, there was a focus on diagnosing individual characteristics—and particularly moral 'weakness'—as a basis of failure, thereby nullifying concerns about how the narrow focus on syllabus-driven teaching and the hierarchical disciplinary atmosphere in Indian schools tends to discourage students from raising questions.

The examination of the examinees continued. Another student was called up and asked why he had not passed a particular subject. The boy said that they had not had enough time to finish the paper. The principal commented that "This means the student is weak. This cannot explain such a low mark. What about English? You failed English as well." When the student replied quietly that the English course had not been completed, the principal responded mockingly "OK, you're saved this time... But you all need to speak, in the home, in the college, tell us what is wrong". He continued in the same tone "How about your attendance? Should I call for the register?" The student, looking down at his feet, mumbled "sometimes I don't come". "Why? Do your parents stop you or do you not come on your own?" Silence from the

student. Yet the principal continued: “How many hours a day do you study?”, and after a brief silence, “Speak fast, otherwise the meeting will go on until two tomorrow.” A tentative reply: “I play for one or two hours, until seven or eight”. The principal then asked if he watched TV, to which the student indicated negatively. A parent, apparently the boy’s father or a relative living in the same household, interjected that “He watches TV elsewhere if not at home, sometimes until twelve or one”. The principal went on to ask if he watched TV every day, and without waiting for an answer, inquired what time he wakes up. When the boy said “at six”, the father stated sarcastically “*Sapne hone ke baad*”, after he is done dreaming. The principal went on, “Do you study in the morning?” “One or two hours”. The principal deduced that “His time for studying is not enough, only one to two hours a day. They need to study for six to eight hours. How many hours will you study, tell me. During the holidays, what will you do during the day?” When the student replied “I will study for three hours”, the principal appeared exacerbated and exclaimed “What *do* you do in the holidays??” Another parent replied here “They are totally free, have no work to do.” Telling the boy to return to his seat, the principal emphatically deduced that: “They are not studying enough at home, *this is the main problem*. If you are not studying, what are you doing?”

The focus on locating ‘problems’ within students—and an emphasis on pathological weakness—during the meeting thus reflects a generalized belief that if children fail in school there must be something wrong with them, as failure is taken to imply a lack of moral character (Clarke 1997) and overall deficiency, “for which they need all kinds of additional inputs, from special tuitions to tonics” (Rampal 2002:156).<sup>27</sup> Yet individual ‘problems’, mostly articulated by

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<sup>27</sup> Aamir Khan’s popular Hindi film production *Taare Zameen Par* presents a picture of the limiting effects of this disciplinary regime for children’s growth and learning.



the principal but also by teachers and parents, were repeatedly abstracted to make statements about students in general. Foucault's (1995) thus describes how a regime of disciplinary power works to 'normalize judgment':

...(it) refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed...The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institution compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*. (P. 183)

Hence, diagnoses of individual students' 'problems' and weaknesses leading to educational failure—particularly lack of dedication and discipline—involves individual disciplining and subjection to norms of conduct, such as time-management and deferral of leisure and play, seen as necessary for success in exams. Yet such individualized discipline is simultaneously structured by, and contributes to, a broader social discourse of development, wherein particular indicators of potentiality and value, such as examinations and employment in 'forward sectors', are normalized. Development subjectivity is thus objectified in its terms of inequality.

#### *Agricultural work as the problem*

A girl from the nearby village of Kandikhal in class ten was called up and her low grades announced. A few parents commented that 'she has some difficulties, does a lot of work at home'. When the principal asked what kind of work she does, someone said 'she goes for grass'. The principal repeated loudly, stressing the significance of this 'problem', "*accha*, (OK) she has some problems, she has to do hard work like collect grass". All the girls started laughing loudly at this comment, as if the principal's focus on having to collect grass as a 'problem' was just too absurd to let pass. Or that the incongruity of hearing the principal talk about collecting grass was absurdly comic. Collecting grass for fodder for animals is an everyday activity in almost every home in Jaunpur, usually performed by girls and young women. Yet despite the ubiquity of young people's, and particularly young women's, involvement in manual work,

agricultural/household work was repeatedly focused on as a problem in relation to educational success. Both the principal and parents reinforced normative associations of farming with failure in the present and future, and success with more time dedicated to studying in the present and non-manual employment in the future. The principal highlighted ‘too much work’ as a key obstacle to studying for exams, especially for girls living in villages, and counseled parents to ‘give less work’.

The threat of having to do agricultural/household work was also used as a disciplining tool. Parents threatened ‘failures’ with immediate withdrawal from school to do this work and with the specter of a future in farming. One parent conveyed his success with using this tactic: “My son failed tenth, then I told him to stay at home, and put him to work. Then he said that he wanted to go, and has studied fine since then. We need to control the kids, one way or the other.” Farming or ‘house work’ is also declared by both parents and teachers as the inevitable future of repeat failures: “This is the second time he has failed. It means he will have to work at home”. And when another girl’s results indicated that she had failed in all five subjects, the principal asked her pointedly “What do you want to do? Farming or a job?” The parent who had requested her results commented that “On the basis of the results, looks like she will do farming”.<sup>28</sup>

The principal proceeded with a longer examination of this girl’s work habits, asking “Do you work at home?” Barely audible and looking down, she replied that she worked a lot. Turning to the parent, the principal conveyed this: “She says you give too much work”. Three or four men proceeded to confirm this: “Yes, she does a lot of work, a lot of farming, hard work...”

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<sup>28</sup> In her ethnographic study of a boys’ government school on the outskirts of Delhi, Sarangapani (2003) makes a similar observation, where agriculture and manual labor are seen as fit for school “failures”. Such disciplining illustrates the particular terms on which “The future world of the adult acts on the present in the form of a coercive, evaluative discipline” (Sarangapani 2003:97).

The principal turned to the girl's father/uncle, saying "This is an open discussion, I am not saying that you are at fault. Give her less work for a few months, until exam time. I am not saying don't give any work, but give less work". Here, schooling is emphasized as a process of "learning and growing up, without productive work" (Sarangapani 2003:78), and in anticipation of an idealized future of non-manual work.

This valorization of mental work associated with the school and the modern workplace, over manual work associated with the home and fields reproduces, in contemporary idiom, colonial notions of modern educated subjects socialized in the superior knowledge and practices associated with the school as opposed to the backward ways of the home (Balagopalan 2002; Kumar 2000). It also works as an ontological denial of other ways of seeing 'work', for example as "an instrument of socialization and acculturation, enabling children to take on responsibilities as a natural part of growing up rather than as a burden in adulthood" (Sarangapani 2003:257). The implication of a regime of schooling-as-development that defines participation in agricultural work as a key 'problem' limiting educational success, and hence equates both present experiences and a future in farming with 'failure', is therefore 'the dispossession of rural futures' (Da Costa 2010a), or the reproduction of material and epistemic framings of rural life and futures as 'not bright'.

### *Rural households as the problem*

The simultaneously participatory and disciplinary tone adopted towards parents in this meeting reflects tensions between an emphasis on the significant roles and responsibilities of parents in achieving children's educational success and the perceived inabilities of rural families to provide supportive atmospheres. In reformist educational discourse, increased participation of parents in schools is proposed as a method of improving accountability and quality in

government schools.<sup>29</sup> Yet this meeting indicates the often disciplinary role of participation, as the terms of participation are structured by broader relations of power. Parents were repeatedly chastised for their lack of responsibility, and given advice in parenting. The principal stressed that “These are problems and shortcomings of the parents also”. This seemed to reflect a common attitude towards parents by teachers in rural government schools; one teacher attending a teachers’ training workshop even went as far as saying that “training should be for parents, since hardly twenty percent of them are educated”.<sup>30</sup>

In the cross-examinations of students—and to some extent their parents—they were asked about and judged on not just their school performance, but their everyday habits, such as sleep, work and leisure. Through examination of the students’ individual cases, the principal established the fact that educational success is dependent on students studying more outside school, and the parents present seemed to agree with this. The principal repeatedly stressed that passing every subject at the high school level is not easy, and takes discipline and hard work.<sup>31</sup> Advice was given to parents on how to create a more suitable *mahaul*, or atmosphere, in the home for students to study. Firstly, likely causes for not studying were established: students staying up late and watching TV, noise in the house, and being given too much other work to do. Based on this, the principal administered advice to parents on how to monitor and regulate their children’s—and their own—behaviors and habits to maximize educational success:

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<sup>29</sup> c.f. De, Dreze, Samson, and Siva Kumar (2009).

<sup>30</sup> Generally, the lack of participation, understanding and responsibility from parents was a common complaint raised by teachers in the valley, as I heard repeatedly that ‘After all, the children only spend four to five hours in school, the rest of the time they are at home’.

<sup>31</sup> Similarly, another government school teacher reflecting on local parents’ lack of support told me that “They don’t have the habits”. She stressed that it was very necessary to support and supervise the children at home in order for them to do well. She emphasized this by adding that her own children study hard, take tuitions, and do homework at home, ‘and they still may have problems’.

The children need to sleep earlier, not watch TV... It is difficult to study in one side of the room if people are watching TV on the other side, you need to exercise some control, not disturb them while they are studying. It's not just work for the kids, but all of us. Especially for the board (exam) years, don't give them too much other work. For the main subjects if they don't study two hours at home, they will have problems. You can do this much at home, ask them what they have studied. If it is eleven o'clock, have they studied before going to sleep? Those in board years who do well wake up at four. They need to do whatever they need to do to pass the boards. Five to six hours of sleep is enough for board children. Start practicing this from now. They need one or two hours a day to relax. Give them less work during the holidays. We want our kids to get good results.

Here, the principal is drawing on an Indian middle-class model of parenthood and regimented time-management to achieve success in exams. He emphasizes that 'it's not just work for the kids, but for all of us'. Hence, it is a model based on the need for everyone involved to 'exercise some control', in which the support and close supervision of young people's schooling is central, and as Donner (2005) has documented in her study of middle class Bengali families' educational and parenting strategies in Calcutta, often "dominates family life around the clock" (p. 129). There is no place for household or farm work in this schedule, indicating how modern schooling in India favors an upper class/caste habitus, a central aspect of which is the absence of manual work in the life of the student (Balagopalan 2008).<sup>32</sup> The principal therefore suggested disciplinary practices that are predicated on particular values, such as time-management, emphasis that the 'work' of students is to study, and distinctions between

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<sup>32</sup> Sarangapani (2003) also observed that in a semi-rural context, parents based their investment in children's schooling on a model of childhood based on a freedom from work, as well as abstinence from play. In urban middle-class contexts, at least theoretically the need for some leisure is recognized as necessary for 'balance'; hence the principal's comments that the students need an hour or two to 'relax'. Yet many of my own urban, mostly upper-middle class, Indian friends—both male and female—have told me how during their schooling and college years they were discouraged and even disallowed to contribute to household work by their families as their 'work' was to concentrate on their studies. For example, recently I met an 18-year old girl from Chennai who was enjoying learning and experimenting with cooking at a residential workshop venue as she was 'not allowed in the kitchen' at home.

such ‘work’ and ‘play’/leisure, associated with a modern work ethic (cf. Willis 1977).<sup>33</sup> This standard is established as a generalized norm since it is seen as required to simply ‘pass’, let alone succeed, in the examination-based education system. Such disciplinary regimes are assumed not just to be necessary, but morally superior, as they reflect self-sacrifice and genuine care on the part of parents for their children towards an undeniably desirable end: the Principal stressed that “we want *our* kids to succeed”. Teachers thus negotiate the perceived limitations of the school as a site of development of rural youth by asserting that “... the generalized concepts and values inherent in the parent-child relationship are reproduced most successfully in middle class households” (Donner 2005:128), and stress the disciplinary practices that they entail as necessary for success.<sup>34</sup>

Parents present at the meeting seemed to take for granted middle-class norms of educational success, and, to some extent, also appeared to evaluate themselves in relation to the desirable norm of parenting presented. For example, male parents repeatedly emphasized their deficiencies and lack of capability in guiding and supporting their children in studies,<sup>35</sup> and that they did make attempts at disciplining students, but without much success given their own lack

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<sup>33</sup> This clear distinction between ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ is itself a modern, middle-class construction. As Dyson (2010) illustrates in her ethnography of girls’ forest work in another region of Uttarakhand, going into the forest to collect leaves is valued by girls and young women for more than its’ utilitarian purpose; it also involves play and opportunities to develop friendships. Experiences of labour and leisure are thus not necessarily exclusive of one another; the distinction is a part of the commodification of labor wherein labor is basis of material value and leisure the source of pleasure.

<sup>34</sup> Reed-Danahay and Anderson-Levitt (1991) show how teachers in France view both urban working-class and rural families as “deviant” for different reasons, but behind their critiques of both types of families there is an underlying assumption of the assumed superior rationality of the middle classes as opposed to the lower classes. The authors suggest that these assumptions are often held by teachers elsewhere as well.

<sup>35</sup> In an interview with an old man in the village of Matela, he emphasized that ‘if our children are ruined, it is our fault’ (*apni kamee hei*); he later said that he educated three of his children (sons), yet they don’t look after him, and ‘this is my fault’. ‘They need the support of their parents’. This feeling that parents and families are responsible for their youth’s behaviours kept returning throughout the conversation, the feeling that there is some internal weakness that is the root cause of the perceived failures of the youth.

of education: “We can only say “sit and study”. We haven't read the course, don't know what they are doing... All parents are not educated. We tell the kids to study, to not roam around...” Parents also reminisced about their own failure in school, one man sharing aloud that “I never passed in school, I was lazy, I remember now, I didn't try, I was careless”. Hence, parents often reinforced a narrative about cultural shortcomings, individual carelessness and laziness as a source of the ‘problem’ of educational failure.<sup>36</sup>

Parents also commented on one another's shortcomings. For example, one parent emphasized the negative attitude of the father of another failing girl from a nearby village: “There is a problem with the father. He doesn't understand the purpose of studying. She is working until very late”. When the principal asked “Then how can she study?”, the same parent responded that “Some parents feel that if their children are going to school, how could they fail? They think that everything should come from the school, the children should just go to school, “buss”, that's all”. Parents therefore seemed to participate in the disciplining exercise by attempting to reiterate their own awareness and highlighting others' lack of correct information about a particular situation, or inability to understand the value of education and its regime of conduct, and hence successfully guide and support students.

### *The politics of problematization*

While parents generally seem to have accepted the principal's logic, they did at times raise frustrated questions addressed to both their children and teachers about the point of their investing energy and money in education when students were mostly failing: “It's *your* future... We want our kids to pass the February exams, otherwise you won't go ahead. We're spending

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<sup>36</sup> cf. Levinson and Holland (1996), Jeffrey et al. (2008), and Sarangapani (2003) have all documented ways in which modern education works to produce a sense of self-responsibility for failure, particularly in contexts of first-generation literacy.

money on this. But what is the purpose? This is a big responsibility for us, and in the end we suffer”. To this, the principal responded that:

Parents should not say ‘don’t study’, that is not the way. We need to put them on the right path, this is our responsibility... These are not just our own children, these are society’s children. *Naam to subhi ka hai* (it is everyone’s name after all). Look at *Jaspal Rana*,<sup>37</sup> where has he arrived, and look at how high his father has reached because of that. We need to explain to the children, by whatever means. By love at first, but if we need to beat them to make them realize, this is OK.

Again, the principal responded to parents’ concerns about the value of education in the face of failure by emphasizing a generalized moral discourse of social value: “These are not just our own children, these are society’s children”. This is an appeal to a generalized, commonsense discourse of education-as-development. Here it invokes the success of a local hero—sportsperson Jaspal Rana—and the status his success has given his father. The value of education is a universal truth *and* has tangible benefits (in Sen’s (2000) terms, both ‘intrinsic’ and ‘instrumental’ effects), and is thus to be encouraged by parents, ‘by love at first’, but also legitimately by use of force if necessary. Concerns by parents that schooling itself may be problematic given widespread failure of their children were therefore dismissed by appealing to a common-sense notion of the social value of education, and of the social benefits of any child’s educational success and more specifically of the status that individual cases of success bring parents, families, regions etc. Here, a discourse of governmental improvement is thus “...projected as benign and apolitical, in the sense of being a transcendental goal shared by all, even as it is permeated by powerful asymmetries, creating developers and subjects of development, good subjects and practices and deviant ones” (Baviskar 2007:287).

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<sup>37</sup> A famous sports personality from the region, who had just won several gold medals in shooting at the Asian games.



In this context, parents' attempts to raise questions about the potential role of teachers and the education system in their children's failure in school were persistently denied space and even silenced. One parent even suggested that 'we need to ask the kids if teaching is going on in class', but his comment was outright ignored by the principal and teachers. As was a question raised as to 'why students are not interested', and 'why they are all saying that they don't understand English and Math'. Hence any questions raised by parents that disturbed the authorities' framing of problems (and hence solutions)—such as the fact that there may be problems within the school, with teachers' performance and/or the curriculum, rather than just within the students and their home environments, were ignored by the principal and teachers, despite the framing of the meeting as a participatory 'discussion'.

Parents' attempts to question the particular disadvantage of rural households in the current educational system were similarly dealt with. Towards the end of the meeting, two sisters were held up as good examples. They were the daughters of a family from outside the region who have migrated to Kempty and own a small general store on the outskirts of the settlement. It was pointed out that they had performed well by just studying, as they also were not taking extra tuitions. To emphasize their example, the principal reiterated how students like these 'work hard to put forward our name, that of the college, the state...' A parent commented that there was a difference between children living in the urbanized settlement of Kempty and the surrounding villages: "The children in villages have to work, there is no work burden for those living in town. The children from villages also have to walk... It is different for those living in Kempty". The principal responded that "It is OK, they may not do as well, but they should still pass." Here the principal's response acknowledges that rural students' capabilities of

success within the education system are *inevitably* constrained; hence they are only expected to pass, not excel.

Hence while this meeting was framed as a ‘discussion’ between school staff, parents and students, any attempts to frame the problem of failure as a political question, or how education is produced and reproduced as a contradictory resource, were sidelined. Key here is a practice of problematization which locates educational failure in individual, often moral, shortcomings. As I have shown, these often overlap with perceived deficiencies of culture and place, or the backwardness of mountain villages. Problems were thus framed by the principal and teachers in terms of the solutions and discourses at hand, namely disciplinary regimes of behavior and work for both students and parents, and a logic of general social improvement.

Arguably, the ‘problem of failure’ is both political-economic and cultural, material and ontological, reflecting the irrelevance of a universalized model of knowledge for rural youth, the sense of distance and alterity cultivated by middle class teachers, and the exclusionary forces working against students’ abilities to fulfill dreams of employment and mobility. Yet by locating failure in some place or person, rather than in a modernist vision of relevance and success, exclusions are taken for granted and reproduced. Hence social discourse is reproduced and depoliticized, as systemic and social origins of failure are evaded, making failure seem either personal or inherent to the cultural and spatial context of a rural region like Jaunpur. We therefore see how such practices of problematization—or an identification of deficiencies by deemed authorities—are also practices through which issues are rendered non-political.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Li (1999, 2007); Ferguson (1994); Mitchell (2002), and Baviskar (2006) among others have made similar observations and arguments about how discourses and practices of development expertise work to elide the politics of development.

As I have shown, processes of reproduction and depoliticization work both intentionally and unintentionally, as an effect of institutional authority and a social discourse of development structuring terms of interaction here, as well as through explicit disciplinary regimes of schooling and of everyday life. Yet the *effect* is significant: the politics at stake is arguably fundamental. It is about both what counts as visions for successful individual and social futures, and the material and cultural capacities to make these visions reality. It is about ways of being, as children as well as adults, and evaluations of human worth. As Foucault (1995) has pointed out, disciplinary assessments thus become judgments not just of individuals' acts, but their very being and potentials for becoming in the future: "Through this micro-economy of a perpetual penalty operates a differentiation that is not one of acts, but of individuals themselves, of their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value" (p. 181). Hence in contemporary India, educational success is closely associated with self worth, and as other scholars have noted, assumptions about the relationships between educational failure and moral deficiency are ubiquitous. For example, Balagopalan (2008) notes the convergence of discourses about doing non-manual labor jobs associated with educational success, and notions of being human. Similarly, Sarangapani (2003) documents perceptions of the illiterate as 'lacking the very essence of what made someone a respectable human being' (91). Hence, educational success and failure—here measured in terms of exam results—is amplified by broader categories of development discourse to produce and reproduce development subjectivities marked by material inequalities and epistemic violence.

## *Conclusions*

In this chapter, I have argued that the rationale of education-as-development works to produce and reproduce a development subjectivity that valorizes ‘modern’ developed positions and identities over those associated with socio-cultural backwardness. To support this argument, I have shown how government school administrators and teachers posted in schools in a rural mountain region in north India implicitly and explicitly ‘work’ to produce education as a contradictory resource, through domination as well as negotiation and compromise. While my ethnographic lens focuses on micro-contexts, I suggest that these contradictions represent larger tensions of capitalist development and particular cultural politics of development in contemporary India.

I have demonstrated how teachers represent an idealized ‘development subjectivity’ through their explicit articulation of a mandate of ‘improvement’, their expression of status and authority, as well as implicit embodiment of an urbanized, middle-class habitus. Such positions structure interactions with rural students and their communities. Hence in relation to the rural communities which they serve, such positions are always relational ones that express differentiation and alterity, reinforcing notions of rural backwardness and of success based on being someone else, somewhere else. As teachers sometimes admit, such relationships based on distinction and differentiation limit their ability to fulfill the explicit mandate of improvement, and therefore also have to be negotiated. I have shown how government school principals and teachers employ inclusionary, reformist terms such as ‘relevance’ and ‘participation’ in addressing ‘problems’ such as high failure rates in exams. Yet such interventions often work as disciplinary and regulatory practices which further naturalize particular forms of knowledge and lifestyles as universally desirable and relevant for success. Hence I have argued that the effects

of their efforts indicate the limits of the inclusionary impulse of development, or “how programs of improvement are shaped by political-economic relations they cannot change; how they are constituted, that is, by what they exclude” (Li 2007:4). Yet while the accomplishment of ‘development subjectivities’ is constantly encountering limits, I have shown how practices of differentiation, problematization, and discipline, contribute to an elision of the politics involved. While it is important to note that teachers are not simply acting to support the interests of select groups or classes, and often have to balance various imperatives as they seemingly work towards contradictory goals and multiple aims (Li 2007), the rationale, or ‘commonsense’ discourse of development, is reproduced.

Tensions between inclusionary claims and exclusionary realities, and the ways in which contradictions of capitalism are depoliticized and legitimated, are arguably inherent to historical processes of development, and have been thoroughly explored in critical scholarships on education as well as development in varying contexts. In this chapter, I have built on such debates to examine how micro-practices of discipline and negotiation work with broader social discourses of modern development to frame terms of inclusion and exclusion, of success and failure, in terms which valorize urban middle-class experiences and claims, and dispossess rural, agrarian lives and futures. These, I suggest, are key sociological dynamics of social reproduction and change that animate discourses, practices and experiences of development in India today. I have also indicated that these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion expressed through education-as-development work both materially and ontologically, as relations of production and ‘stories of value’ (Liechty 2003). As such, the overlapping material and ontological dimensions mean that “The politics of inclusion and exclusion is not a binary in which some are excluded and others are included; rather, it is a way that the included represent themselves and appropriate the

subjectivities of the excluded as well” (Zacharias 2001:34). Education is thus a contradictory resource that expresses tensions of development not only because it often fails to lead to mobility through desired jobs, but that it also denies other material and ontological meanings of ‘success’, or visions of ‘bright futures’. Hence, I have shown how the meanings of success—in terms of passing exams and subsequent implications for choices in work and lifestyle, as well as establishing right attitudes and behaviors—are taken for granted. Such assumptions about universal, common goals in turn legitimate disciplinary forms of intervention *and* discourses of individual and cultural shortcomings as a basis of failure, where failure means not passing exams but also individual moral weakness and a future of ‘backwardness’, including manual work. In the context of Jaunpur, I have thus argued that development subjectivity involves particular notions of identity, space and productive work, which reproduce positions of ‘backwardness’ for rural students and their communities.

As Li (2007) highlights, practices of governance always involve elisions, erasures and exclusions. For example, it involves the creation and maintenance of boundaries between development practitioners and those to be developed, as well as a rendering of issues as non-political. The limits of government are thus also contained in these practices, as “Questions that experts exclude, misrecognize or attempt to contain do not go away” (Li 2007:10). Hence while the ‘accomplishment’ of development and its universal, inclusionary vision is often convincing, it is also compromised by realities of place, of politics. Such exclusions and compromises have effects. In Jaunpur, it has meant the production of a new “development rain shadow” (Pigg 1997:266), where the rains have come—in the form of development funds and projects, including government school facilities—yet the promised yields have failed to materialize. In the following chapter, I explore such dynamics in greater detail through an examination of how

rural youth and elders in Jaunpur in varying ways experience, negotiate and at times contest, education-as-development.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “NEITHER HERE NOR THERE”: ELDERS AND YOUTH NEGOTIATING EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

People are dying of hunger in this world, yet no one wants to do farming...  
(Male elder, farmer, Gairh village)

Here education has mostly brought problems—15-20% benefits, and 80% problems from education in Jaunpur. Educated people give little attention to society, culture. As needs increase, people look at each other, compare and copy, want what others have—for example the motorcycle of a *job-wallah*—and somehow get these things but then there are problems. Desires are increasing, resources are limited, there are tensions...  
(Male parent, shop-keeper and community leader, Kempty)

The interplay between processes of development and middle-class formation and aspirations is being enacted at the village level by the country's underprivileged citizens.  
(Ciotti 2006:913)

#### *Introduction*

In a media interview, P. Chidambaram, India's Finance Minister and a leading architect of the country's economic reforms since the early 1990s, was asked about the state's controversial acquisition of farmland for the creation of Special Economic Zones. He responded that “in India there is a sacred bond that binds the tiller with the land”, yet added, “Should so many people depend on land? No country can afford to have 65 percent of its working population dependent on land...*They are not there as a matter of choice*, they are there because they are not skilled to do anything else...” (“P. Chidambaram at the Express” 2007:8).

How does the Indian Finance Minister know that the majority of India's people living in rural areas are on the land not as a matter of choice? What does he see as more desirable choices, and how will they be enabled? These are questions which can be asked of dominant discourses about development in contemporary India, in which a lagging rural sector is seen as a



key hindrance to the realization of a new “India Shining” of high economic growth rates and expanding consumption by urban middle-classes. As I showed in the previous chapter, such discourses often frame problems and solutions—and hence the parameters and meanings of choice and change—in terms of a dominant *rationale of development*. Here the Finance Minister’s comments indicate how this vision of development is one in which agriculture and rural life are inevitably residual, unfeasible and a compulsion rather than a rational choice and potentially prosperous future. Other choices are presumed to be more realistic and profitable—such as urban residence, wage employment and consumption.

Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen has similarly stressed that education is key to enhancing “...the freedoms that people actually enjoy to lead the kind of lives they have reason to value” (Dreze and Sen 1995:13). But as an article in a major daily newspaper titled “*Gaon goes global*”, or ‘village goes global’, suggests, education in contemporary India is generally linked to market-inspired visions of values and choices. It tells the reader that “Everyone wants good life, not just city people”, presenting a ‘village farmer’ and ‘shopper’ browsing the aisles in India’s first rural mall, and goes on to list the desires of India’s rural consumers : processed foods, clothes, beauty products, technological gadgets, automated means of transport, and housing in the form of apartments (“Gaon Goes Global” 2007).<sup>39</sup> By framing social mobility for rural Indians in middle-class consumptive terms, the ‘village goes global’ article weaves together modernization assumptions about individual choices and social trajectories with the market-centered frame of neo-liberal development to present “powerfully compelling stories of value” (Liechty 2003:232). As I have demonstrated above, media representations often promote such

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<sup>39</sup> This ‘shopping list’ represents the huge increase in production and availability of consumer goods, and hence deepened commodification of social life and natural resources, in both urban and rural markets in post-liberalization India.

stories (Mazzarella 2003), but academic discourses also contribute to the naturalization of particular terms of choice and change. For example, a prominent Indian sociologist has described the Indian village as “a shrinking sociological reality” which is “no longer a site where futures can be planned” (Gupta 2005:752), while the ascendance of the ‘great Indian middle class’ is often taken for granted (cf. Fernandes 2006). But the newspaper story also highlights how this imaginary is a part of everyday experiences, quoting a rural shopper having just outfitted his children with jeans and western clothes, and equipped his home with modern amenities: “I have girls to marry off, we shouldn't look like *dehatis* (villagers)” (“Gaon Goes Global” 2007). As Liechty (2003) observes in his study of middle-class identity formation in Nepal, commercial compulsions therefore “exert their power less through their ability to somehow “brainwash” consumers than through their proficiency in feeding off of, or capitalizing on, the *social imperatives* that people face in their daily lives” (p. 114).

In this chapter, I argue that questions of choice around development and rural social reproduction are in fact far from clear-cut. I draw on conversations and participant observation, semi-structured interviews, group discussions and surveys conducted in Kempty and villages in Jaunpur to examine generational and gendered experiences of modern education and social change.<sup>40</sup> Education and reduced dependence on agriculture are commonly referenced as key means through which the kind of ‘expanded choices’ and ‘freedoms’ signaled by the Finance Minister and Amartya Sen are realizable for the rural *aam aadmi*, the common man. Yet here I complicate such claims by examining how education is experienced as a ‘contradictory resource’ (Levinson and Holland 1996:1; cf. Jeffrey et al. 2008) at the center of changing imperatives and terms of rural social reproduction.

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix A and B for details and reflections on field research and data collection.

In villages of Jaunpur, social reproduction is not organized according to an urban, middle-class ideal. At the same time, experience of schooling and the construction of an ‘educated’ subject-position have substantially impacted household economies and familial as well as community relationships, particularly since many youth in the region are first or second generation school-goers. School education thus significantly contributes to how young people are envisioned and envision themselves as productive individuals engaging in worlds of work and in familial and broader social relationships. In Jaunpur, education is widely perceived as crucial for potential social mobility, both in terms of employment and lifestyles. Yet given the distance between ‘schooled ideals’ (Balagopalan 2005) and the everyday lives, the often poor quality of teaching and pervasive political-economic inequalities, hegemonic aspirations around education are often ambiguously experienced. Here, I thus show that education is experienced as a profoundly ‘contradictory resource’ in multiple ways: in relation to uneven outcomes of employment and social mobility, but also in its relationship to the varied material and cultural demands and negotiations faced by elders, young women and men in relation to a changing rural moral economy. Such evaluations challenge assumptions that social mobility and empowerment are inherent in the experience of education—as Sen’s framework, and most policy as well as popular thinking on education and development do—and raise fundamental questions about the meaning of prosperous and productive futures: that is, what kinds of lives do people have reason to value, and what are the means of achieving them? A critical examination of the intersections between education and rural social reproduction thus necessitate asking, rather than assuming, how changing notions of productive futures, of identity and work, resonate with modern, market-centered values and choices, as well as material and cultural conditions of life in a particular time and place.

The first section of this chapter thus locates experiences and evaluations of education in relation to changing terms of social reproduction in Jaunpur. Parents in Jaunpur *do* want education for their children, and expect, or at least hope, that education will provide them with employment and non-agrarian futures. Children, youth, parents and elders in the villages of my research described education as ‘essential’, and tied education to a ubiquitous expectation for change in terms of a dominant discourse of social and individual improvement. In this context, what one young man described as ‘*naukri ka craze*’, the craze for employment, primarily drives people’s sense of the value of education as a means of social mobility. Discourses around education in this rural mountain valley therefore seem to reproduce a “development subjectivity” (Gupta 2003:71) rooted in economically rational, modernist choices and dreams—such as inclusion in a market-oriented modernity through wage employment and consumption, and escape from the perceived drudgery of manual work and the limited returns of small-scale mountain agriculture. Expectations of material change through work and lifestyles overlap with notions that education should lead to moral and dispositional improvement of children and youth. As such, I indicate how educated desires are about ‘more money for less work’, but also about ways of being and ‘becoming something’ (Luttrell 1996).

Here, dreams of individual improvement and social mobility in middle-class terms, and perceptions of the non-viability of small-scale agriculture are expressed as two sides of the same coin. Yet rural productivity is also degraded by people’s investments in education. Children’s school-going is recognized as significantly impacting household work routines and relationships, as well as inculcating values such as competition, thus imbricating education in changing engagements in and evaluations of household, often sustenance-oriented work, versus employment and wage labor. As such, associations between being educated and seeking waged

employment both *derive from and contribute to* a context in which small scale agrarian production is increasingly experienced as unfeasible and undesirable. I therefore explore how experiences and aspirations around education are linked to social change and reproduction in complex and often uneven ways.

In the second section, I show how village parents and elders reproduce teachers' perceptions of children and educated youth as a 'problem', similarly citing their inability to gain desirable employment. But they also complain about the limited or grudging participation of educated youth in agrarian work, and educated youth's dispositions and behaviors: their individualism, lack of responsibility, desire for consumer goods, inability to listen and pay respect, and disdain for Jaunpuri cultural traditions. Generational tensions are not just about educated youth's lack of productive contributions, but over appropriate modes of individual and social behavior, communication and values. I therefore show how elders' narratives about educated youth, and the generational tensions they entail, express a double disappointment with perceived inability to fulfill both the economic and moral functions of social reproduction. Elders in rural Jaunpur assess education and associated changes as compromised both in relation to expectations from a modern, monetized economy, *and* the material and moral values of a sustenance-based agrarian economy.

Finally, I examine how educated young women and men in Jaunpur at the center of competing and often contradictory expectations and aspirations varying experience education-as-development. The narratives of youth reflect the power of modernist development discourse to structure self-conceptions, most significantly as a strong desire for a future removed from agricultural and manual work, but also generally as a means of moral improvement and 'becoming something'. Modern education is thus experienced as a process of socialization into

urban middle-class social norms, ‘epistemological styles’ (Appadurai 1990) and aspirations. Yet I also demonstrate how young women and men varyingly negotiate the perceived compromises and failures of education-as-development, as gendered implications for realities of their current and future lives. Thus, I show how education is also experienced as a source of displacement, alienation and conflict, as well as of value and possibility for change and a different life, suggesting the emergence of new, negotiated forms of educated subjectivity.

### *Education and the Expectation that “Something Should Change”*

Given the expansion of basic school education as a mass experience in the last twenty years, education is a key component of narratives of socio-economic change in Jaunpur. When asked to reflect in general about the impacts of education, or the meanings of education, most people provide positive answers. In the course of my research, I have repeatedly been told by parents as well as youth and children that education is essential. Education is often central to the organization of households as children spend most of their time in schools, and decisions about resources, residence and work are made around ensuring access to school-based education. There is a generalized social discourse that emphasizes the good behavior and mannerisms of educated people, the everyday utility of skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as the necessity of education for social mobility through non-agricultural employment.

Positive expectations from and evaluations of education are a part of broader changing social aspirations. As a father of several school-going children explained, “we cannot keep our children uneducated today. This has also become a source of embarrassment. We cannot keep them isolated. They need education to live today, before maybe five percent were educated, today ninety percent are.” The assumption of common goals—that apply to everyone

universally—is therefore partially what gives the rationale of education-as- development its power as a compelling, legitimate and commonsense public imaginary. As ethnographic studies of the micro-politics of development have shown, this vision is both reproduced *and* compromised by the material and cultural realities of everyday life (cf. Baviskar 2007; Klenk 2004; Mosse 2005; Pigg 1992). Parents—many of whom themselves are illiterate or have experienced only a few years of poor quality primary schooling—feel intense social pressure to educate their children. Many young parents are migrating from villages to semi-urban settlements where living conditions resemble slums to provide their children private schooling or higher education, and express that they are prepared to sell land in their villages to educate their children in English-medium schools. As a middle-aged man who had migrated to Kempty to educate his children in non-governmental schools and ran one of the general stores flanking the roadside explained, “You are nothing without an education in today’s world”. Education is therefore widely experienced as a means of countering spatial and socio-cultural marginality.

To 'be nothing' without education equates education with 'being something'—upon elaboration, it is a vision of being framed by the contours of 'today's world'. During a conversation with six young men in Nautha, a village in the valley located an hour's brisk walk from the closest road, a youth with a class ten education told me that "Without education, thinking would be limited to the village, we would not see possibilities and opportunities outside". He went on to reflect that: “Educated people feel disappointed without things”. This extra-local imaginary he called "the mentality of my generation", and reflects a classic definition of a 'modern outlook'. Apart from employment opportunities, it seemed to reference forms of modern, middle-class distinction and desire: a lifestyle of more leisure and entertainment, variety, and consumption. Similarly, Sukhpal, a man in his late twenties who was teaching in a

SIDH village school, felt that:

People now see life as *thaat-baat* (leisure), they think ‘why are we working ourselves to death when we could live more easily’... From education people have gotten this sense that they want to preserve their bodies, take it easy, and not do such hard work, especially manual work. People feel that they will live better if they do less work. They also say that we did so much work, and we didn’t get anything from it, there is no change. Now there is an expectation for change that wasn’t there before, something should change.

The expectation that ‘something should change’ from being educated therefore ties together economic and cultural notions of social mobility as desirable work and ways of being. Key to this ‘change’ is obtaining more remuneration from less work, equated with employment, particularly in the form of non-manual labor. Almost every parent I have spoken to has said that their main hope from education of their children—at least for boys, at times for girls as well—is that they get a good salaried service sector employment, mostly favorably defined as *sarkaari naukri*, government service, but increasingly also ‘private’ employment.<sup>41</sup> Young people almost always echo this aspiration. When I asked a group of boys and girls between the ages of seven and ten in Lagwalgaon village government primary school why they go to school, they provided the ‘correct’ answer in chorus, without hesitation: ‘*naukri*’ (service sector job).

Desires for employment reflect both need for income and aspirations for modern ways of being, and are frequently articulated in relation to perceived inadequacies of small-scale agrarian production: I was often told that it is ‘no longer possible to live off farming’ in this region, that ‘agriculture is not profitable compared to amount of time and effort put in; wage labour or service jobs are much more profitable’. An educated young man in Ghair village told me that

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<sup>41</sup> Public sector employment remains the most desirable option for rural youth and families, as it provides ‘stability’ through relatively high incomes that are regularly adjusted for inflation, and securities such as tenure and pension etc. At the same time, I was told that increased access to ‘private’ employment (generally small scale entrepreneurship or temporary, informal sector work) has meant that an increasing number of men (largely) are engaged in wage labor instead of farming.



“*hisaab-kitaab se* (by accounting), if we think about how much effort and time is put into farming versus the profit that comes out, it is so much less than doing day labor or other work—it comes to only about ten rupees per day! No wonder people are trying to do other work.” As people also indicated, the terms of *hisaab-kitaab* that tip evaluative scales against agrarian production also include increasingly unpredictable and unfavorable weather patterns, scattered land holdings, low remuneration for agricultural goods, and increasing cash needs.

As agrarian regions of India such as Jaunpur experience forms of ‘new rurality’ (Vasavi 2006)—spaces geographically defined as rural, but economically and culturally urbanized—a key expectation from education is therefore that it should enable the ‘freedom of an individual to participate in labor markets’ (Sen 2000). Yet are education and labor market participation necessarily a ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ of rural decline? As I have indicated and illustrate below, the desire for employment is about more than economic advancement; it is connected to broader phenomenologies—or material and symbolic meanings—of rural work and identity, and how they are a part of cultural politics in a particular place and time (Da Costa 2010a; Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003). In the context of my research, education was frequently referenced as pivotal to changing terms and evaluations of agrarian livelihoods, indicating how compulsions of education for employment, desires for change and evaluations of agriculture are intimately connected. For example, Puran, a male in his early thirties working as a teacher in a SIDH primary school in his village, told me that:

In the beginning when children went to school, they also did house work properly. Parents gave less attention to education. Now parents have started giving a lot of attention to education. They urge their children to study, and don’t want them to do house work. So because of education, attention to farming and animals has decreased. As they get older, they have to study more, parents want them to do well, there is a lot of competition, so they don’t want them to do much work. Their attention is on *naukri*, after all if they get a service sector job they are set for life. So parents want their children to enter into competition. This is happening in my family...It used to happen in cities,

now it is happening in villages. Ten years ago, my grandfather never said that we should compete.... My grandfather also did outside work but he also gave a lot of attention to house work.

Puran's comments highlight how education is linked to the compulsion to compete and gain employment—and the seeming inadequacy of agriculture compared to the possibility of being 'set for life' through a public sector job—in varying and complex ways. The impact of education on patterns of social reproduction includes changes in labor activities and relationships between and evaluations of different forms of labor. Children have traditionally played an important part in the household division of labor, contributing particularly to the care of livestock by collecting feed and grazing goats, cows and buffaloes. Animal husbandry was traditionally a source of income, while crop production was largely for sustenance. Hence, when children go to school every day, a significant portion of their labor, as well as potential household income, is lost to the classroom. In anticipation of the deferred reward of government employment, parents are therefore choosing to withdraw their children from the household labor force, and they are generally unwilling to rejoin once they are out of school. Another community teacher felt that "even when kids have interest in farming, parents want them to study, to get a government job". Puran's comments about his grandfather also doing wage labor but not valuing it more than agriculture also illustrate the changing relationships between and evaluations of household and wage employment. A colleague of Puran's similarly recounted that his father had a high-school education and had obtained a service job but left to return to the village, "he did not value *naukri*". A shopkeeper and community leader in Kempty confirmed this notion that the compulsion for employment is historically and culturally produced:

Before there was often a division of labor where a few people in a family were uneducated and stayed with the animals, while a few educated people did *service* or a job for money. But now if two brothers are separate and one is educated and the other

uneducated, the educated one never thinks of how they are related or how they can help each other, or the future of the illiterates...

Such comments suggest that the degree of contemporary compulsion around employment, and its alienating implications for social relationships and agrarian production, is distinctive from experiences of income-generating employment in the past—or how imperatives of modernity stem from experiences of the commodification of labor rather than representing ‘natural’ choices and values (Liechty 2003).<sup>42</sup> Today, engagements with wage labor are associated with privatized notions of accumulation and attitudes towards manual work that preclude full participation in an agrarian moral economy.

The displacement of locally-based livelihood skills and options through education applies to traditional trades besides agriculture. For example, when a skilled artisan carpenter and carver was asked why none of his children were doing this work, even though it is a profitable trade, he responded initially by speaking of his own lack of focused engagement in carpentry as he is ‘doing ten other jobs’. Had his children not learnt this trade because it was devalued? He replied that no, this was not the case, yet no one in his family wants to learn. Did he try to teach them? He replied indirectly that “Well, I sent them to school...” The fact that schooling is seen as taking the place of the possibility of his children practicing carpentry, even though it is a direct source of cash income, illuminates how desirable education is, and how thoroughly the compulsions of development have transformed perceptions of viable livelihood options, choices, and values. The stress on education for employment and self-definition, and the devaluation of agriculture and other local forms of manually-based work are therefore closely connected.

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<sup>42</sup> Reflecting Marx’s (1979) key insight that the notion of freedom based on formal equality of contract *seems* inclusionary, but this is illusory because of relations of exploitation underlying commodification.

*'From the Village Perspective': Elders' Disappointment and Sense of Decline*

The association of education with aspirations for wage employment echo the Indian Finance Minister's developmental assumptions about what kinds of choices and trajectories make rational sense for an educated rural person. But aspirations are interspersed with the anxieties induced by a shortage of desirable employment opportunities, rapidly increasing cash expenses, and unwillingness of youth with a high school or higher education to return to rural/household work. Parents in Jaunpur regularly conveyed intense disappointments, and even bitterness and anger, with the behavior of educated youth. One father of three school-going children from the village of Matela told me that "Parents are disappointed. It is also so difficult to get jobs, there are millions of people with degrees—and even if a job is possible, it is necessary to have connections, money. There are very few parents who are satisfied, who feel like their expectations and dreams are fulfilled. They see their kids as a problem these days."

Narratives of failure and disappointment are therefore largely about the gap between expectations and outcomes of education, and particularly the inability of young men to secure employment and income. But elders also routinely complain that educated youth who do not find employment also resist contributing to household and farming work. Young educated women were described as 'wearing fancy clothes' and 'not wanting to dirty their hands with cow dung'. And educated young men, particularly those with a high school or higher education, were perceived as routinely shirking manual work, and doing tasks irresponsibly. An illiterate male elder in the village of Matela felt that:

Educated youth have no time for house work, family work. They do such work only because of pressure from their parents, not because they want to. Those who don't get jobs have to do work, but don't understand their responsibilities. If they don't get a job at least they should do house work with responsibility, but if they even have an inter education, they refuse—for example if they are to take out the animals, they will wander around all day".

Speaking of his children, a father told me that “they are ashamed to do anything, even pick up the milk can...” Some went further, stating that “if they (youth) don’t get work, in the end they get spoilt, become crooks”.

Despite the increasing value of knowledge, skills and lifestyles associated with being educated and employed outside of the village and agriculture, for parents and elders the narrative of education and employment as the basis for social mobility and development is compromised by experiences of anxiety and disappointment. Disappointments are about youth not fulfilling productive expectations, but also moral decline, and a breakdown in norms of correct behavior. Elders spoke of a lack of ‘care’ among educated youth, and an unwillingness to listen. Children and youth who attend school are seen as experiencing the world differently than elders; they have different reference points as to what it means to be a young person, how a young person should behave and appear. A local government primary school teacher in the village of Ghair described educated youth as “*VIP-like*” (a ‘very important person’), reinforcing the notion that educated people become individualized as ‘special’. He went on to explain what he meant by this: “They don’t want to listen to anyone, they look down on people, do everything on their own account... They have their own system of behavior, dress, hair style... They behave differently in weddings. And no matter how many times you say something, they don’t respond”. Similarly, a local SIDH teacher thus described educated young men’s behavior at weddings:

They don’t want to do anything, just be fed...they stay at the back. If there is a job like speaking in the mike and directing people they will do that, but they will not come forward to do things like washing vessels. If they studied until class ten even, they see work as fit for others, even elders. They stay back, don’t take responsibility.

These comments articulate conflicts with educated ways of being, stressing how dress style, demeanors and notions of appropriate work express distinction, individuality and authority

become means for educated youth to distance themselves from, and at times even disrespect, local norms.

Parents also identify a link between youth's individualization and their desires for consumer goods, and a concurrent rejection of all things local. They feel anxious about the economic costs of such changing tastes in a context where youth are not earning: As a male village elder in Matela put it, "Now everyone wants good food, good clothes, good soap, good shoes... Educated kids don't like the food that we produce here, like *mandua ka aata* (finger millet flour). If we make (these) *rotis* (breads) no one will eat them". 'Increasing standards' of educated youth were therefore associated with 'commodity desires' (Mazzarella 2003), indicating how education is perceived as part of a 'package' of market-centered dispositions and tastes. For example, a male parent told me that 'most educated young men today drink, and that too *English liquor*. They don't value local liquor. *They have this image that 'this is made for us'...*' Educated youth's self-images are thus perceived as inherently shaped by commodity desires. Another elderly man decried the lack of concern about sources of income and a seemingly selfish focus on consumption among the youth. He asked "...where will this (the things that they want) come from? They don't think about this. Twenty-four hours they want money...They put their hands in their back pant pockets and wander around, they just come home for food, and that too want special food." Hence, generational conflicts around 'educated ways of being' are concretized in their overlapping moral and material dimensions in these perceptions of youth's desires and demands for consumer goods and rejection of local foods, their lack of economic contribution and focus on self-gratification.



Figure 11: *Mandua* (finger millet), a food grain valued for its nutrition and durability under long-term storage. (photo credit Jasione Duckett)

### *Elders Negotiating Different Terms of Value*

As I have indicated above, critical assessments of educated youth reflect a broader notion of decline through incorporation into a modern moral economy that education is a part of. Here, I suggest that such critiques by elders also draw on the evaluative framework of a village moral economy.<sup>43</sup> In the course of informal conversations that Shobhan—my research associate—and I had with elders in four villages in the valley about what kinds of socio-economic changes they have seen over the last twenty years, we repeatedly heard the perception that during this time education has increased, and income has decreased. To further probe the substantive meanings

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<sup>43</sup> In an analysis situating a people's movement for land rights in Brazil, Woford (2005) has made use of Thompson's (1971) notion of 'moral economy' to highlight how both an economy based on 'subaltern/peasant cohesion and mutuality' and the market rationality of neo-liberal capitalism represent moral economies—or 'historical, diverse and situated claims'. In the South Asian context, ethnographic studies such as those by Gold (2009) and Liechty (2003) highlight how these are not experienced as discrete, but coexisting bases of contextual moral and material evaluations and claims. Yet they also affirm the significance of examining how the material and cultural power of a market economy works to deny the pursuit of alternative values in a rural context.

of these comments, we conducted a basic survey of one of the villages where such perceptions had been voiced.<sup>44</sup> We generally consulted the designated male household head in each of the sixteen households in Dabla-Matela about current household economies, as well as perceptions about production, income and expenses twenty years ago.<sup>45</sup> The impression of economic decline was repeatedly reinforced by respondents of varying ages indicating that they felt that their household was ‘worse off’ now than in the past.

Yet upon compiling the data, we found that contrary to popular perceptions, the overall village economy was running at a decent financial surplus, rather than at a loss. However, in terms of real production as well as its contribution to overall income, the role of agriculture has declined significantly. Agriculture can no longer be considered the economic mainstay of this village; real agricultural output has declined and at the same time village resources come increasingly from extra-agricultural sources. Currently, only about thirty percent of village income comes from agriculture and animal husbandry, while seventy percent is obtained from other employment (wage labor or private service employment, mostly temporary or seasonal in nearby tourist towns of Kempty Falls and Mussoorie). Twenty years ago, a rough estimate of fifty-six percent of income came from agriculture and animal husbandry, while forty-four percent was obtained through other employment—hence there has been a twenty-six percent

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<sup>44</sup> For details on this survey, see Appendix B.

<sup>45</sup> The village of Dabla-Matela consists of two small settlements with a total population of one hundred and sixty-six people. The hamlets are located about five hundred meters apart, and separated by a perennial stream and a wide terrace of sloping fields. There is an unpaved road that skirts both settlements, and connects to a paved road leading to the larger qasbah of Kempty (3 km), the tourist day-trip site of Kempty Falls (3 km) and the hill-station town of Mussoorie (15 km). In Matela, there is a SIDH primary school, which has been operational for about 15 years. Young children either attend this school or the government primary school in the nearby village of Lagwalgaon, which has existed for about 20 years. After class 5, most children now attend at least a few years of junior high school and high school in Kempty.



decline in the proportion of income from agriculture and animal husbandry, and an equivalent increase in the proportion of income from other sources of employment. Our survey indicated that for most households in Dabla-Matela, it is not cash income that is declining but a sense of worth and value obtained through agrarian production, and this is the loss that they had expressed. In their evaluation of their economy, people in this village had implicitly emphasized the value of agriculture and animal husbandry, as assets and wealth, and as the mainstay of a relatively secure, non-marketized economy.<sup>46</sup>

The sense of value and decline alluded to a meaning of economy defined not just monetarily, or even in terms of means of production, but equally held together by the rituals, norms and relationships of rural social reproduction—such as weddings, food, song and dance, architecture and families. Hence elders’ articulations indicate shifting forms of materialism that are also ‘embodied moral visions’ (Gold 2009), reflecting generational differences and values—from an emphasis on accumulation and sustenance of wealth, primarily in terms of grain, to generation of income for consumption. As Gold illustrates in detail, and my respondents’ narratives broadly indicate, these include intricate webs of meaning that are a part of livelihood practices, such as human relationships with animals, with grains, and the modes of communication which sustain them. The displacements that education effects, as a trajectory towards modern forms of employment and lifestyle aspirations, are therefore experienced as profound.

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<sup>46</sup> As a recent development report on the region recognizes, sustenance agriculture brings low rates of return but is also linked to household food security and low levels of absolute poverty (Planning Commission Government of India 2009). Such recognition of the productive benefits of small scale agriculture is increasingly being recognized in the face of the current global food crisis (McMichael 2008).



Figure 12: Female elder cleaning grain and caring for young child, Talogi village. (photo credit Jasione Duckett)

The most widely cited indication of weakening of social relations within villages is increasing tensions and fighting within families and subsequent break-up of joint families into nuclear families. When asked about the causes of such fighting, I was told by a local SIDH school teacher who, as the eldest son, is the head of a large joint family, that it is increasingly over money. He said that “Since most things have to be bought now, and one needs money, there is fighting as some family members earn more, others less.”<sup>47</sup> Insecurities associated with wealth-in-terms-of-income over wealth-in-terms-of-grain were also linked to the visibility, and hence material transparency, of the latter over the former. Others spoke of tensions in joint

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<sup>47</sup> Education, health care and marriages are key areas of cash expenditure. A SIDH teacher from Matela thus linked increasing costs and scale of marriages to competition and changing expectations: “Expenses on marriages have much increased, spent on meat, alcohol, clothes, jewelry. People used to say that they wore simple clothes, and that they cooked the *daawat* (feast) with four or five *kaddu* (pumpkins). But the competition over weddings has increased. Now invitations are sent by letter, when people just used to send word. For a boy’s wedding there are a lot of letters, for a girl’s also... These days we are writing letters in the evenings for a village girl’s wedding. So far we have written 200 letters, the father is getting more printed, there will be around three hundred letters, with three to four names in each letter”.

families between brothers/sons (and their wives) who are earning income and those who are doing household labor, as the latter are increasingly felt to be dependent on the former to meet market-based needs. The relative status of money compared to grain, given increasing dependency on the market, is therefore perceived as one cause of strain within families.



Figure 13: Traditional grain-storage container in a home in Talogi village. (photo credit Jasionne Duckett)

Elders in Jaunpur pointed out multiple links between the decline of collective values and resources, and increasingly market-dependent, modern lifestyles and facilities. For example, new ways of building houses in villages depend entirely on supplies from the market—mostly cement and tin—thereby increasing their financial cost, as well as dependence on and status of, income-earners. New designs of houses are in turn seen as connected to changing relationships within families. Traditional Jaunpuri houses are large but have only two rooms, and members of joint families spent most of their indoor time in one room together. The majority of households in the village of Dabla-Matela are joint families with ten to twenty members, but today most also



Figure 14: Contrast of new and old architecture, Dabla village. (photo credit Jasione Duckett)

live in new houses with many small rooms, in which people eat together and then disperse to their individual units. This is perceived as both a sign and a cause of the decline of families' sense of togetherness.



Figure 15: Matela village. (photo credit Jasione Duckett)

Perceptions of a break-down of collective values and rituals extended beyond families to village communities, often indexed in terms of the changing form of cultural events such as

festivals and weddings. For example, I was repeatedly told that people do not sing and dance together in the village square during festivals because they have TVs and CDs to watch in the comfort of their own homes, and “Educated people think that singing together is backward.” Similarly, young men were blaring ‘filmy cassette music’ through ‘big speakers’ at weddings, ‘so there is no singing, dancing’. Thus, the combination of individualization and privatization, desires for commoditized experiences and internalization of discourses of ‘backwardness’—all associated with education—are thus perceived as corroding collective feelings and expressions. Whether in field work, building houses, marriages and festivals, making roads, protecting the local environment, taking care of sick neighbors, people—and educated youth in particular—were seen as giving minimal attention to these shared material and cultural resources.



Figure 16: Elder and young child working together in Matela village.

The perceived role of educated youth in conflicts between families in villages was illustrated by an encounter in Nautha village, thus documented in my field notes:

Nautha is not connected to a motorable road, so Shobhan and I descended down the valley to the village on a footpath, having walked for about forty-five minutes from Kempty. When we walked into the main part of the village, we first met some carpenters who were building a house, and beyond that two young men were laying some stone

foundations. Shobhan asked what they were doing and they said building stairs going up to the roof. It was right by the village path, and Shobhan asked them if they wouldn't be blocking the path. They said 'no, the path will remain same as before', but this looked doubtful to me, it's going to be very tight to pass on an already narrow path. Later we learned from the *Gram Pradhan* (head of the *Gram Panchayat*, a local governance body which includes seven villages) that there had been a fight between this man and another over money, and now he was blocking the path in spite...

The *Gram Pradhan* told us his version of the story a little later. He was tending to his mango trees in a meadow lower down in the valley. Upon returning to the village, he joined us outside the SIDH Nautha school. When I asked him how he saw changes in the village due to education in the last twenty years, he starkly assessed the distinction between (an uneducated) past and (an educated) present: "There was no information among the uneducated, but there was lots of love among people. If anyone was in trouble, everyone would help. Now everyone is educated, but brothers are not even willing to talk, listen to each other. *Mein hu, bus*; there is only me, that's all. Before there was also a leader who could bring people together. I am talking about my time, when I was a kid, people believed in old people. Now no one believes, has faith. For example there was a fight the other evening about money, there were insults involved, I tried to intervene but I was not given recognition, one of the parties said "if you get involved it will be bad". This is wrong, I am the *Pradhan*, this is my role. There is a lack of respect, selfishness, they were not responding to pleas to forgive each other, for peace etc. Educated youth make a small thing big, don't listen about the problems of going to court... Now this person is closing off the village path by building stairs. This affects everyone. After conflicts become big it is difficult to go back. (Field notes from February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

As such, the *Gram Pradhan*'s comments express how 'tensions between models of personhood based on care and intergenerational reciprocity, and liberal individualism'(Cole and Durham 2007:20) promoted by development policies and projects such as schooling are seen as causing irreparable breaks in social relationships in villages like Nautha.

Pivotal to the decline of a collectivist ethic underlying a sustenance agrarian economy—and the ascendancy of individualist ethics—is educated youth's changing relationships to manual work. Given the mountainous terrain in Jaunpur, agricultural work such as farming and animal husbandry involve strenuous manual labor, and have traditionally depended upon the entire joint family's—and in some tasks even community's—participation. While young people still



contribute to household and farm work, they spend less time doing so—illustrated by a sharp drop in ownership of domestic animals which were traditionally grazed by children—and may do so haphazardly and reluctantly. Participation in agricultural work is a means of contributing to household reproduction, but it is also a way of sustaining relationships. As Durham (2007) shows in her analysis of projects aimed at youth empowerment in rural Botswana, changing attitudes towards and practices of work significantly impact inter-generational and community relationships.

Education and associated aspirations, tastes, desires and dispositions—including the compulsion towards employment—are therefore a part of the new cultural and material economy of production and consumption for private and individual ends. This economy and its *hisaab-kitaab*, or accounting, is seen as conflicting with the collectivist ethic underlying a sustenance agrarian economy. For example, an elder felt that “Differences are definitely there (between educated and uneducated), their ways of doing work, talking, appearance—differences are definitely there. But in terms of the village perspective, the uneducated person’s condition is better.” Others differentiated not just between educated/uneducated and urban/rural, but also added the categories of educated people who get jobs and those who do not, or “*are neither here nor there*”: “Educated people who get a good position do well, but for those who are neither here nor there, it is difficult. But those who are uneducated are more understanding, they are willing to do any work. Their economic condition is better than those in the in-between category.”

The articulation of the feeling that from ‘the village perspective’ an uneducated person is better off culturally and economically than an unemployed educated person confirms the significance of critically examining the social and economic values of education and the aspirations it engenders in particular contexts and for varying located subjects, rather than

assuming that education automatically expands or constricts what people ‘have reason to value’. Parents in Jaunpur reproduce the abstract ideal that education should lead to jobs and to moral improvement. Yet concretely, they express deep disappointments, reflecting exclusion and alienation—or how ‘becoming a part of the world has frequently entailed becoming marginal to the world’ (Weiss 2004:8)—as well as the continued salience of different standards of value and assessment in the context of changing rural social reproduction.



Figure 17: Three generations, Talogi village. (photo credit Jasione Duckett)

### *Young Women and Men Negotiating Education, Work and Self-Worth*

Educated youth in Jaunpur are at the center of competing aspirations and expectations. Teachers and parents commonly frame youth as ‘failures’ and ‘problems’, stressing their



inabilities to fulfill varied roles in social reproduction. However, their criticisms tend to focus on youth's educational failures as 'cause' of such crises, rather than as indicative of "wider recasting of sociality" (Weiss 2004:15). In this section, I examine how young women and men in the Aglar valley themselves articulate their experiences and negotiations of education, in relation to expectations and aspirations, as well as disappointments and critiques articulated by teachers and community elders. I argue that educated youth's reflections provide a lens on such wider 'recastings of sociality', including re-evaluations of material and epistemic value in work, identity, rural space and relationships.

*Young women: desires, expectations, realities*

Pooja, an eighteen year old from a more remote village in the valley but living with family in Kempti to complete her BA in English and work as a teaching assistant in an NGO school, told me that "here all girls I know, except a few who are from better off families, want to earn money." Many young women I spoke to in Jaunpur dreamt of becoming teachers. Some were also investing time and money into tailoring classes, as running a tailor shop is a popular business for women in the region. Neeta, a sixteen year old girl from Kandikhal village studying in class ten, told me that while she dreams of becoming a teacher, 'there are lots of kinds of work in the world'. The growing awareness of, and interest in, employment among young women reflects how middle-class ideals of education for employment—embodied in the school teacher and expressed through normative discourses of success and mobility—frame aspirations for

these young women *despite* the fact that employment is not the normative trajectory for women in this context.<sup>48</sup>

The powerful desire for employment highlights values associated with different kinds of work, beyond financial remuneration. Young women did express a wish to be able to contribute to personal expenses (including marriage costs), but the overarching aspiration articulated was to do work other than farming. Educated girls and women stressed that they are not being educated in order to continue doing farming. One teen-aged girl told me that “we are even afraid of the word ‘farming’”. Girls and young women commonly complained about the hardships involved in farming and animal care in a mountainous environ, as they perform most of the day to day work in the villages like feeding animals, cutting grass, collecting wood, leaf-matter and fodder from forests, and work in the fields. As one young woman put it, “women get weak. This is the reason that educated girls want to do jobs. Or at least leave the village”. Another linked the desire for leisure to changing generational expectations: “there is too much work, we can’t ever just sit and talk... This is a difference between our parents and us, they can work hard, but we want some leisure. There is no end to work here.” Young women defined success as ‘less work, equal income’, citing the example of an ‘officer’ who puts in less effort but makes more money. In sharing her aspirations, one girl studying in class ten in Kempty inter-college put it bluntly: “last chance *me kheti karenge*”, farming is our last option. Young women therefore embrace ideals of formal employment and social mobility which valorize monetary income, urban lifestyles and leisure, and simultaneously cast farming and manual work as undesirable.

Yet young women in varying ways experienced and negotiated conflicts between the ideal of education for employment and local gendered scripts of social reproduction in a

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Willis (1977) on how the notion of a ‘job choice’ is in itself historically a middle-class construct.

changing agrarian economy. Saroj's narrative illustrates such negotiations. When I met Saroj, she was visiting her natal village, Talogi, to attend a marriage. The village was obviously recovering from festivities: the small central square was strewn with dirty leaf plates and metallic strips of streamers fluttering in the wind and catching the light above. Shobhan and I also met an apparently drunk man as we walked through the village, which led Shobhan to comment that Talogi used be known as a village where no one drank, 'now it is the opposite... alcohol is a problem here'.<sup>49</sup> Shobhan knew Saroj as a former student in a SIDH primary school, and he asked her if she would be willing to talk to us for my research. She said she would as soon as she finished hanging up laundry to dry in the sun. When I told her about my research questions, she laughed and said that there were a lot of problems from education, definitely more problems than improvements, "*bohut dikdat hai*".

When I met her, Saroj was in her early twenties, and married with two young children (both girls). Her husband was employed in the police force outside of the region.<sup>50</sup> She lived in her marital village, and not with her husband at his place of employment because her labor was needed in the household, as they had lots of farm work. In her marital village, she described people as 'less educated', 'backward', with 'very few girls in school, and the birth of a boy is celebrated but not that of a girl'. Saroj felt strongly that girls should be able to study as far as

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<sup>49</sup> Talogi village is located about a kilometer from a motorable road (though a road was being built in 2008), in the valley between Kempty and the tourist site around Kempty Falls. Its close proximity to these semi-urbanized, roadside locations, has meant that a significant number of men work or spend majority of their time outside the village. Some have shops or offer other seasonal tourist-services in Kempty Falls, drive taxis/jeeps, day labourers, some are employed outside the region including in government service. Talogi was an early site of SIDH involvement, though currently it only runs a *baalshaala* (pre-primary, though here extended to class two) in the village. Older children attend school in Kempty.

<sup>50</sup> Saroj was thus considered 'successfully' married. When asked about desirable traits of a future husband, employment in the public sector was indicated by young women in my research as key.

they want, stressing that she herself chose not to study on after marriage (she had studied up to class ten), yet quickly adding that this was not really a choice but because she had children. She also anticipated that she would have to move to educate her daughters, maybe to Nainbagh, the closest semi-urban *qasba* settlement to her village, or elsewhere, as there was only a ‘useless government school’ in her marital village. “I won’t educate my daughters there.”

Saroj clearly values education for her daughters and for girls in general, yet based on her own experiences, she also asked: “What is the meaning of education if we cannot do jobs, if we have to work in the house? It is like being uneducated.” Her question about the value of education beyond employment suggests that gender mediates expectations and evaluations of education for youth (Chopra 2005; Da Costa 2008; Jeffery and Jeffery 1994), producing varied ‘educated’ subject positions. I was repeatedly told by school administrators, teachers and female students that girls take their studies more ‘seriously’ than boys and routinely perform better in school, despite having to do much more household work. Like the Kempton high school Principal, young women told me that girls are unable to ‘do something’ with their studies: ‘...girls get married fast, they can’t do what they dreamed of....then they have to listen to their in-laws, and it doesn’t matter if they are educated or not. Families don’t think that girls can be educated and do something.’

In negotiating gendered social and familial expectations and evaluations of education and their contradictions with dominant aspirations, these young rural women therefore ‘confront powerful and often contradictory images about who to be and how to act’ (Mills 2001). These young women reproduce developmental framings of the ‘problem’ of ‘lack of awareness’ among families about the value of education for girls. Yet their negotiations of multiple expectations at the same time indicate ways in which a dominant discourse around educational success and work

is culturally produced. A key effect of formal schooling on these young women's self-positioning is their conception of desirable work in spite of their continued engagement with manual work (Balagopalan 2008). As Saroj pointed out, "while you study you do less work", hence when school-girls suddenly become wives and are expected to contribute to hard labor they find it difficult, "you are not used to it". Schooling is thus seen as habituating the body to more sedentary forms of work, leading to physical as well as psychological conflicts with the often rigorous manual labor expected of young brides and daughters-in-law in a mountain agrarian context. Saroj's comments thus suggest how the rationale of a 'development subjectivity' insinuates itself into the habits and bodies of rural youth through the daily routines of schooling. As such, young women's aspirations around work reflect the power of dominant social ideals, but also how they work through physical habits that mark the body for particular kinds of labor. This is a subject position experienced as 'difficult',<sup>51</sup> as it conflicts with demands and expectations of local gendered scripts of social reproduction.

For young women, a universalized discourse of education-as-development is therefore actively negotiated through conflicting ideals and experiences of work, family and identity. For example, most young women I spoke to acknowledged the fact that they will have to do farming, regardless of their education and contrary desires. Changing gendered divisions of labor have meant that household and farming work are increasingly construed as work for girls, women and uneducated elders, as 'boys are making money'. Hence Neeta, studying in class ten, has studied further than both her elder brothers, yet does a majority of house/farm work, while her brothers' man a roadside shop. Gendered work roles also involve shifting evaluations of work, where

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<sup>51</sup> Similarly, see Klenk (2003) on how development is experienced as a 'difficult' subject position by rural women.

(women's) household work is undervalued in relation to cash-earning (men's) work, and in which the multiple values women have ascribed to agricultural work in the region, such as relief from the perceived confines of the house and a chance to socialize and develop friendships with peers (Dyson 2010), as well as relationships with ecological environments (Gurarani 2002) become marginalized. In Bhatoli village, a sixteen year old girl studying in class ten said that 'we will do it (farming), but we don't want to be behind'. Her comment suggests that young women's desires for other kinds of work are not simply rejections of manual labour, but rather indicate negotiations of dominant standards of educational success, *and* experiences of an often increased work burden that is economically and culturally devalued. Hence self-positioning for these young women involves working through the fact that education and even success in studies is not generally a passport to social mobility in dominant terms for them, despite being schooled in an ideology and habituated in practices for another kind of life, *and* experiences of an often increased manual work burden that is economically and culturally devalued.

Dominant notions of 'development' therefore work through notions of 'backwardness', especially in terms of rural lifestyles and manual work (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003). Young women in particular negotiate the overlapping referents which 'over-determine environmental subjectivities' that valorize non-manual, 'clean' work and urban space (Jeffrey et al. 2008). As a part of such negotiations, they express desires for development in modernist terms; for example I found that young rural women in my research who continue to engage in manual, agrarian work alongside or after schooling often negotiated such positioning by emphasizing the multiple values of education, particularly its importance for self-improvement

and personal transformation.<sup>52</sup> A girl studying in class twelve at the inter-college stressed that “Education will help us have a better life even if we don’t get jobs.” Similarly, a young woman in Talogi village felt that “Education changes things from within. You get strong, can talk to everyone, you can live in a better way. You can write, you have knowledge. You don’t know anything if you are uneducated.”



Figure 18: Young women and children in Talogi village.

The moral and behavioral benefits of education for girls were often framed in relation to the uneducated, as well as to educated boys. A common refrain was that while girls get ‘improved’ by education, boys ‘don’t get anything from education’. When I asked a group of young women aged between sixteen and twenty-four what they meant by this, they elaborated that ‘With boys you can’t tell who is educated and who is not, you can’t recognize an educated boy. Educated boys get spoilt, teach uneducated boys bad things, roam... drink and smoke all

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<sup>52</sup> See Jeffrey et al. (2008) on how educated and un/underemployed young men in North India also emphasize the value of education for self-improvement.

kinds of things, spend money...They don't study enough to get jobs. If they do get work, they don't get good jobs, *hotel line*, washing dishes. Girls' behavior gets better from education, educated girls talk better, fight less'. I asked Saroj and a group of other young women about the discrepancy between their comments that young women's behavior gets 'improved' from education, and the widespread perception in the region that demands and conflicts involving young married, educated women were key to break-up of joint families and the formation of independent nuclear households. This in turn was often described as a key indicator of social and moral decline in Jaunpuri villages. In response, Saroj and her friends laughed loudly: 'yes, we can't live together anymore. We think we could be happier in a small family. But men also have a part to play in the break-up of families, especially men who are away and don't know what is happening, girls stay in the home so get stuck more. So they want to live out'. From their point of view, desires to live in nuclear family households are therefore a way of negotiating changing household relationships, work roles and, increasingly, modern "family regimes that valorize mobile masculinity and localized femininity" (Ong 1999:20). Hence, while "education is often an attractive basis for young people's gender projects because it offers a relatively novel index of success distinct from older measures of power" (Jeffrey et al. 2008:21), such 'projects' and the positioning they entail are often relational negotiations of compromised outcomes.<sup>53</sup> They suggest that young men do not get 'good' jobs *and* behave badly, while women are not able to pursue employment but at least their behavior improves, and that conflicts experienced by young educated women in extended family households are as much about their

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<sup>53</sup> These young women's assertion of the moral benefits of education seem to counter Sen's (2000) notion of the 'intrinsic value' of education, in that it reflects a socially produced, relational and compromised sense of 'improvement' rather than an abstract or ideal subject position.



own actions and expectations as they are about the physical and moral distancing of young men. Young women therefore embrace educated subject positions defined by self-improvement, as well as negotiations of compromised outcomes.



Figure 19: Young family, Talogi village. (photo credit Jasione Duckett)

### *Young men: pressures, 'ruin', balance*

The discourse of education for development through employment is, in this context, primarily a male narrative presented as universal, yet young men's reflections also highlight these framings as varyingly experienced and negotiated. Dinesh, a twenty-four year old with some college education currently 'doing interviews' for jobs while manning a relative's shop in Kempty, emphasized that:

Schooling is only for employment. After being educated, living in the village, doing farming, is not compatible. If one has to do this, then there was no need for education. When one doesn't get work one also feels disappointment. One also feels that why did I do all this education? It also seems to me that if I had only studied until class eight, I would have earned two to three lakhs by now.

This young man's comments reflect clearly the key rationale of education-for-development that education is for employment; yet at the same time stresses failure as a key outcome of this project.

A group discussion with six young men in Nautha village illustrated how experiences of failure frame self-positioning, particularly in relation to work and self-worth. These young men were aged sixteen to twenty five, and, apart from the oldest who was illiterate, all had at least a class ten education. I was told that in this village, which is at some distance from a motorable road, not a single person has obtained permanent government employment within the last ten years. These young men were engaged in temporary wage employment of some kind; as cooks or tea-stall employees in nearby towns, and as daily wage laborers, including in construction work within the village. All of them said that they also contribute to household work. For young men, desirable and appropriate work is linked to but not only evaluated in terms of wages: "If one asks people who have studied up to inter-college to come for some daily labor work, they say no, they don't want to be seen picking up rocks, they are ashamed of this". There is thus a strong notion that manual work is not for educated youth. At the same time, these young men were all engaged in wage-employment based on manual labor, and I was told repeatedly that '*private jobs are the biggest source of improvement, kids who leave and get jobs making 1500-2000 rupees, washing dishes etc.*' Hence, even outcomes of material improvement through employment are compromised, as young educated men's income is primarily earned through manual, though non-agrarian, work.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Given the competition and considerable financial expenses (in the form of bribes) involved in procuring government employment, I was told that private sector jobs (largely in the unorganized sector) are increasingly favoured by educated youth as "cheap and best". Although the salary disparity between private wage labor and government employment is huge (at the time of my research, about Rs. 3000 for a

Young men also reflected on the the self- and social-evaluations associated with different kinds of work. One young man in his early twenties told me that “If someone gets a job, they are a good person, if not they are bad. This is the feeling that comes from education. People also come to feel about themselves that if I get work I am OK, if not I am bad.” In comparing the experience of working for a wage and for self-sufficiency, another young man stressed that: “Employment is a pressure. When people do farming for a living, they are self-sufficient, both the problems and successes are due to their own actions. But when people are not doing jobs, they feel useless.” Here, the self-sufficiency of farming is valued not in economic terms but in broader terms, as a self-sustaining practice contrasted with the externalized, disciplinary pressures of employment. Another young man stressed that “There is strong pressure on youth to earn money, to obtain facilities for the house. How to earn money, youth live in tension around this. Sometimes in this tension young people’s visions get changed, they have no trouble doing dishonest work”. Similarly, a young man told me that “People change from education, and have a desire to do good work...but end up getting spoilt, not able to do anything”, linking moral degeneration with a paucity of models for youth in a changing rural social landscape. Hence while young men shared a general desire for non-manual employment, they also counter the moral valorization of an employment-centered regime of social reproduction. Instead, they experience hegemonic aspirations and the conflation of economic success and failure with self-

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full-time labourer versus 9,000 for an entry-level position in a government agency), the former is easily obtainable. Settling for informal, private-sector work is thus a part of experiences of neo-liberal development in contemporary rural India.

worth as a tension, as exerting ‘shame’, ‘pressure’, even compromising moral judgment and action.<sup>55</sup>

The pressure of employment was therefore at times reflected on as a form of injustice, as young men felt they have to shoulder the entire burden of a shared social expectation of employment. Some implicated both teachers and parents in their lack of desire or inability to provide support and guidance. For example, an educated young man in Nautha village felt that “Within a family, everyone should be educated to avoid the problems that the mix of educated and uneducated brings. A lot of problems stem from this.” Some also spoke of the lack of ‘concern’ on the part of teachers—highlighting the distance cultivated by teachers and the perception that ‘teachers don’t talk to children’—as well as their parents’ own lack of experience of education, and therefore inability to provide relevant ‘guidance’ as well as to understand the difficulties they face, as causes of their failure to live up to expectations. In this context, Dinesh strongly expressed his frustrations with the narrative of young people getting ‘ruined’:

People say that young people have become ruined, but there is also a lot of pressure on them from parents and elders. If you are educated and want to stay in the house rather than leave the village, they say what is the point of education, why study if you are just going to do the same thing...

Hence, from a hegemonic perspective, a young educated man choosing to live in the village is not a rational one (cf. Morarji 2010). Another young man countered elders’ narratives about young men’s lack of involvement in household work, suggesting that in the hills, young people’s focus on family responsibilities is something that ‘holds them back’; ‘there is not one young person here who has not done house-work before coming here (to this meeting)’. Together, these comments indicate how generalized discourses of educational value frame what it means to be an

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<sup>55</sup> See Jackson (1999) on the importance of recognizing how men’s relationships to hegemonic gender discourses around work are often contradictory and complex.

educated young man in ways which fail to accommodate the negotiations and multiple constraints that they experience.

Dinesh went on to offer an alternative view: “It is not necessary for all youth to get a job, out of four to five, one should take care of the home.” When asked how this would work if all five were educated, he responded that:

There should be a limit on jobs, one should be able to do a job for a certain amount of time, or if a brother gets a job, one should be willing to do work in the fields. Four brothers do not all need to get jobs. It’s true that the one left behind is seen as inferior, this is a problem... but it is also a fact that the one who stays behind becomes the family-head, he has to take care of day to day things, see to things...

Dinesh thus articulates a desire for ‘balance’, or different ways of organizing and evaluating means of social reproduction that can both meet changing needs and maintain relationships to rural place and production. While the hegemonic rationale of education-as-development precludes agrarian visions of successful futures, educated youth varyingly articulate the desire for alternative possibilities, suggesting the emergence of new subject positions shaped by negotiated experiences of development, education and social reproduction.

#### *Valuing place, relationships and change*

As young people encounter various ‘raw materials for scripts for possible lives’ (Appadurai 1996:3), middle-class, developmental ideals promoted by modern education play a significant role in shaping normative terms of desirable futures. Negotiations on the part of youth highlight the varied meanings of self-development (Luttrell 1996), as ‘becoming something’ includes gaining employment, but also encompasses broader values of social reproduction reflected in lifestyle and relationships. As Jeffrey et al. (2008) have similarly shown in their study of educated, unemployed young men in northern India—expectations from education resonate with aspirations for modernity beyond the economic imperative of income. It

is also about countering representations and self-assessments of lack of cultural and epistemic worth, or socio-cultural backwardness. Hence young men and women struggle for self-respect and value, as well as social purpose and recognition. At times, these desires are indicated in liberal terms of individualized agency and market-centered ‘commodity desires’. Yet as I have shown, young women and men also position themselves in relation to local gendered scripts of social reproduction. They thus negotiate—by critiquing *and* valuing—material needs and cultural codes of an agrarian moral economy. For example, while elders commonly expressed the notion that education is linked to the cultivation of individualism, I found that this was also a concern among youth. In a written survey I conducted with about two hundred middle- and high-school aged youth in villages in the valley asking them how they see the impacts of education in their lives and communities, the majority linked education positively to all aspects of life except collective thinking and cooperation.

Young women and men’s compulsions as well as frequent ambivalent desires for change, and the bases of such experiences, were therefore perhaps clearest in reflections on village versus city life. In addressing my questions about whether they would prefer a future life in a village or urban environment, most young women and men initially responded that they would prefer a future in a city. They associated urban life with more ‘choice’ and opportunities for mobility through studies and employment: the city was thus perceived as a space where ‘you can work towards a good future, a good life...to grow, get ahead’. The city was also assessed in relation to perceived negatives of village life: for young women above all, as a space of less work—‘we would just have to study and take care of our own food, that’s it’—but for both women and men also an escape from social pressures, restrictions and constraints associated with the village community: ‘we can’t speak openly, there are always people telling us what to do, telling us we

shouldn't laugh, that we speak too much...' Jobs and "consumer desires reside in the city" (Liechty 2003:94), but these young people also value the city as a space of modern autonomy and anonymity.

However, Neeraj, a man living in Kempty, in his late twenties with a BA and some work experience in urban areas, indicated that:

In the context of village and city, the state of youth is dilemma. Those youth who have experienced city life are now tired of it. They understand the difficulties of the city. Now most of them are looking for work near their homes. In cities it is often difficult to make ends meet. Those who have stayed back (in the city) are mostly in difficulties.

Neeraj's comments captured how rural youth may positively value rural life in relation to direct experiences of struggle in cities,<sup>56</sup> but I also more generally perceived that young people's desires for change did not translate automatically into wholesale rejections of village social and environmental space. I heard repeated articulations of the value of collective unity and community relationships, the 'clean air, water and open space' found in village. Many young people concluded their reflections on city versus village life by indicating that they would in fact want to live in a village 'if we had..... in the village'. Here, young women mentioned 'facilities for an easier life in the house', including good schools, tapped water, but also consumer goods like television and CD players, while young men focused primarily on the need for employment opportunities: 'If our families' economic conditions were ok, we would want to live here in the

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<sup>56</sup> A similar point was made by Naresh, a parent, shop-keeper and community leader in Kempty, who told me that "Today, in areas where people were educated before (like in parts of the neighboring Jaunsar region, where due to tribal status many had access to education and employment through reservations), people and resources are shifting back to the village. They understand properly what's happening in cities, and when they can, want to come back. But here in Jaunpur things are changing now, there has been less education and when people get education, there is more loss". Naresh's comments thus reiterate that *experiences* of education and urban employment and life may counter dominant aspirations and notions of success.

village. Today people from outside want to live in villages.... But these days if anything we are getting two thousand rupee jobs, you cannot live on this. We need better work. We want to live here.’ Despite the power of urban-centric aspirations, relationships to rural place played an ambiguous role in young people’s self-positionings (cf. Leyshon 2008). Such ambivalent assessments of urban and rural space therefore reflect the co-existence of varied aspirations and visions of future life: youth want facilities, a ‘bank balance’, commodities, less work, ‘to live openly’, but they also want to ‘improve society’, ‘become something’, ‘be able to distinguish between right and wrong’, and strengthen collectiveness and unity in their villages.



Figure 20: Middle-school children from local schools attending SIDH’s *Sahjan* program (a short-term residential value-education course, see Chapter Three) on their way to an anti-plastic pollution rally at Kempty Falls.

## Conclusions

The power of development as a project of governance is reflected in the “public appropriation of societal transformation in the name of development” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agarwal 2003:3), often seemingly overdetermining social narratives about present and future lives. In the context of contemporary India, it is a vision which simultaneously marginalizes



rural space, production and cultural identities as bases for desirable futures, while valorizing market participation and urban middle class lives. In this chapter, I have reiterated how education is a significant (and under-studied) site through which development mediates lived and imagined social categories and identities, particularly in relation to changes in social reproduction in contemporary rural India (cf. Jeffrey et al. 2008; Vasavi 2006). I have shown how, in a context of material and cultural decline, education *is* widely perceived as a way out of rural backwardness and into the modern economy. Education is also valued as a means of cultivating moral improvement and ‘modern’ dispositions and habits. Jaunpur is thus a context like many others in which the material and moral values of a market economy seem to overwhelm those of a sustenance agrarian economy, yet tracing this story through the lens of people’s experiences of education highlights how this situation is produced as an uneven one of competing and often overlapping values and meanings. Negotiated experiences of education thus capture the cultural politics of development in a particular time and place.

In this chapter, I thus elaborate on the previous chapter’s examination of how dominant narratives of success and progress embedded in modern education are always actively produced and experienced. I argue that people’s experiences of changing relationships that constitute social reproduction counter abstract conceptions of education-as-development. They counter a singular definition of Jaunpuri households as ‘backwards’. And they suggest that:

Schooling is not simply a neutral thing to be acquired. Schooling enters people’s lives bathed in notions of sacrifice, promise, and progress. It is a mode of becoming and belonging to particular places and times, within particular families and in relation to siblings and parents with dreams of shared or competing futures. (Da Costa 2008:290)

Hence, changes in the terms and relationships of social reproduction, and the negotiations that they entail, are a part of how people encounter education-as-development in their daily lives, but

are not accounted for in modern frameworks of educational value, of success and failure. Education therefore effects uneven socialization into a dominant “development subjectivity” (Gupta 2003:71), thereby complicating both notions of education as an automatic passport to social mobility, and education as a disciplining project through which inequalities of capitalist modernity are reproduced.

Here, I have thus analyzed ‘educated subjectivities’ as sites of negotiation and contradiction, necessitating attention to phenomenologies of rural social reproduction: of work, as well as material and epistemic expressions of individual and social identities. Firstly, I have illustrated how the dominant rationale of education-as-development is experienced as a negotiation of failure, alienation and compromised outcomes. Parents and community express disappointment with educated youth, based on their inability to gain desirable employment or contribute to the moral economy of the village, and indicate both as necessary for social reproduction. Such disappointments suggest education-as-development is experienced as a ‘contradictory resource’ in that it fails to provide the necessary cultural capital for mobility *and* disinherits local youth from local forms of cultural and economic capital valued in a rural mountain context. Hence from ‘a village perspective’, education is not ‘naturally’ perceived as a ‘solution’ to rural decline, but widely recognized as contributing to the dispossession of rural futures, challenging modernist narratives of education as a ‘social good’ (Jeffrey et al. 2008), as well as of agriculture as a ‘residual’ mode of production (cf. Gupta 1998). Secondly, I have demonstrated how educated young women and men in Jaunpur experience such contradictions of being ‘neither here nor there’, as they aspire towards non-manual, income-earning work and modern ways of being, yet varyingly negotiate the normative experience of continued involvement in manual work—whether household and farming work in the village, or manual

informal employment such as in small restaurants in urban areas—as well as experiences of social and commercial pressures, changing gendered and generational roles and relationships, and desires for other ways of being. Young women and men thus articulate how they recognize and value moral behavior and relationships, yet see their actions and choices as shaped in relation to compromised outcomes and conflicting expectations. People *do* desire and value education and development in normative terms, but they also signal the limits of such projects and, at times, indicate the desire for alternative arrangements. As such, these ambiguous evaluations reflect people's complex, negotiated and changing relationships to material and epistemic terms of social reproduction.

Negotiations of discourses of mobility and improvement, of economic and moral 'backwardness', highlight limits—but also, I want to suggest, potentials—that arguably delineate contemporary rural modernity and the 'varied histories of power' (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003) that shape such projects in India. For example, they indicate how in contexts like Jaunpur, peoples' self-positionings are shaped by dominant framings encountered through teachers and schools, *and* local notions of sociality and spatiality, or concerns with how and where to organize one's life. They reflect changing economic and cultural terms of development, familial and community relationships, as well as relationships to rural place. For example, youth desire experiences associated with modern, urban life, but they also suggest a need for ways to 'balance' income-generating employment with the 'work' required to sustain rural place, production and communities, thereby generating different subject positions through education, development and social reproduction. While youth desired urban lifestyles, they also articulated values of rural environment and community, and at times expressed the wish to be able to live what they see as a dignified and prosperous life, in a different kind of village. As such,

negotiations of compromised outcomes are therefore also potential moments of praxis, or critical reflection on normative terms of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ and arrangements which sustain these norms and possible alternatives (Da Costa 2010a). While youth in Jaunpur agreed with elders that there has been an overall decline in the quality of relationships in villages, their negotiations necessarily involve multiple subject-positions and notions of self-development, as ‘becoming something’ includes gaining employment, but also encompasses broader values of social reproduction. Hence while emergent educated subjectivities for youth in Jaunpur often appear as the basis of conflict, their “...attitudes and actions also point towards potential reconstructions of responsibility in altered social and economic contexts” (Gold 2009:365).

As a part of the larger story of ‘tensions of development’ that this dissertation narrates, this chapter thus highlights how parents and youth negotiate competing notions of individual and social value and productivity. People’s responses to ‘education as a contradictory resource’ in Jaunpur are complex, and their experiences complicate bourgeois, urban-based ideals and norms of education and social reproduction. These are not smooth processes of socialization into ‘modern’, middle-class norms and dispositions over ‘traditional’ cultural norms. Instead, the term ‘neither here nor there’—used by an elder to describe the condition of unemployed educated rural youth—captures the relational, ambiguous and often overlapping dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, of desire and denial, involved. Similarly, the observations and comparisons that people make about the merits of traditional practices and systems are undoubtedly motivated partially by disappointments with education and the lack of jobs. Such critiques expose how power of education-as-development is often experienced as marginal incorporation into a modern economy of desires, aspirations, identity, labour and exchange. But people also draw on competing values of a localized, sustenance-oriented agrarian moral

economy. As a parallel—and at times intersecting—way of thinking about production and the organization of life, this moral economy does not merely signal a pre-modern tradition. Positive evaluations of rural social relations and production may at times represent romantic visions of better pasts, but they also represent negotiated possibilities in present and future lives. The ongoing evaluation of education and change through the lens of the village and its moral economy indicates that these are not merely ‘residual’, but continue to serve as orientations for people’s lives and choices. They thereby expose development and its terms of ‘rationality, choice and freedom’ as a particular moral discourse of differentiation and evaluation rather than a universal story of natural unfolding of progress. Such varied evaluations also highlight notions of ‘development’ based on mutuality, cooperation and the quality of human relationships, as these continue to orient people’s standards of value and action. The following chapter of my dissertation tells the story of an organization aiming to institute education based on such alternative values of development in the Jaunpur valley, highlighting the material and ontological politics of development as a powerful *and* negotiated project of social change (cf. McMichael 2010).

## CHAPTER THREE

### FIGHTING ‘THE TIDE OF DEVELOPMENT’: CONTESTATION AND COMPROMISE IN THE LIFE OF AN EDUCATIONAL NGO

Gandhiji often talked about the difficulties of trying to change the system of which one is a product, as well as of the paralyzing effects of modern education and State-domination on the ability to envision alternatives. The close links between dominant ideologies of ‘development’, ‘progress’, market economics and modern education makes it very difficult to defy conventions and work toward alternatives. In fact, the dominant system is so pervasive that the alternatives that exist are isolated and can never become the norm. Yet, as Gandhiji believed, it is still the responsibility of individuals who have a sense of perspective and are able to see the larger picture, even if they are a part of it, to continue to fight the tide and provide examples of the possibility of alternatives. (SIDH 2000)

Resistance is part of the wide field of a general human praxis, where human beings are created as they create collectively their conditions of life, showing always the ‘mismatch’, ‘ragged edge’ and unpredictability of the relation between what is ‘reproductive’ and ‘confirming’ in their actions, and what is dissatisfied resistant and challenging. Here is scope for change, for politics, for becoming – not for utopianism or despair. (Willis 1982:137)

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I look at the negotiated production of critical education and development, as vision and practice, in the work of the Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas (SIDH), a non-profit organization based in the Aglar River valley of Jaunpur block, Tehri Garhwal district, Uttarakhand, north India. SIDH’s story brings together significant aspects of the key theme of my dissertation; namely how education-as-development is both a governing project and negotiated and contested in this rural mountain valley, and how such processes reflect larger cultural politics of development. As the quote above suggests, it is a story that particularly highlights both the historical and ethical mandates, and the challenges of individuals and collectives engaged in critical struggles against ‘dominant systems’; of countering the

‘poverty of imagination’ associated with modernist regimes of capitalist development (Da Costa and McMichael 2007) as reflexive, historical subjects who are a part of this material and discursive field. By examining what is at stake in SIDH’s story, I thus reflect on what Willis (1982) calls ‘the wide field of human praxis’: of dealing with contradictions and constraints, disappointments, changes in context, the lives of subjects, philosophical and political ideologies, and terms of recognition. At the same time, I speak to the particularities of engagements with the tensions of development and ‘enchantments of modernity’ (Dube 2008) in the context of near-contemporary rural India.

SIDH is a registered Non-Profit Organization (NGO) that has worked to institute education and development in the Jaunpur region since 1989. While starting out with aims of providing developmental services in what was considered an ‘underdeveloped’, semi-tribal mountain area, the organization soon responded to critiques from local mothers of how schooling was ‘ruining’ their children by alienating them from agricultural work and Jaunpuri culture. From the mid-1990’s, SIDH therefore began to focus on providing locally-relevant education in their small rural schools. Hence when I first came into contact with SIDH as a volunteer in 1997, the organization self-identified as working for “alternatives to development” (Klenk 2003:104). I returned to SIDH to volunteer in 1999, as well as to conduct preliminary research in 2002. My assessment of the organization was extremely positive; I was deeply inspired by the commitment of the leadership and staff to both theoretical critique of modern education and alternative pedagogical practices. As a volunteer, I assisted SIDH’s research and advocacy teams in collating and analyzing data collected in three in-depth qualitative studies in the region—one documenting and analyzing Jaunpuri folk songs and stories; another examining attitudes about health and nutrition which served as a basis for a training manual on men’s

involvement in women's reproductive health, and the third on regional expectations and experiences of education. The research teams impressed me with their reflexive, nuanced reflections and use of participatory research methods, and the resulting published monographs which I felt were of high quality. Through these projects, which were aimed to serve as bases for pedagogical projects, the organization seemed to centrally engage with the conflicts between modern school knowledge and other culturally and locally-specific ways of transmitting and valuing knowledge and skills (cf. Levinson and Holland 1996).



Figure 21: SIDH's 'upper' Bodhigram campus, home to Bodhshala middle school and the 'model' primary school.



Figure 22: SIDH's new 'lower' campus, completed in early 2007, housing administrative offices, residential and dining facilities, library and the Gap Year College program.



In SIDH's village primary schools and their middle school in Kempty,<sup>57</sup> a semi-rural roadside administrative and commercial outpost (locally referred to as a *qasba*) on the outskirts of which SIDH's campus is located, I met children who appeared stimulated and joyful in an open atmosphere that seemed free from the often repressive discipline of mainstream government and private schools in India. The children were engaged in innovative place-based, research and project-oriented study programs. Children sang the Indian national anthem at the morning assemblies, but also performed Jaunpuri folk songs and dances. Given the significance of song and dance in Jaunpuri culture, these were routinely incorporated into the school day. Local holidays were recognized, and the school calendar scheduled in accordance with seasonal weather constraints and agricultural cycles. Teachers and staff, who apart from SIDH's founders were all from the region, were articulate in contrasting such attention to local context, as well as the pedagogical practices in SIDH schools with the total reliance on centralized schedules and textbooks in government and other mainstream schools. They argued that apart from inducing boredom and lack of significant learning, the knowledge and assumptions conveyed through official and 'hidden' curricula perpetuated a culture of 'backwardness'.<sup>58</sup> They stressed that not only is mainstream school-education often irrelevant to the lives of rural children, but also contributes to notions of cultural inferiority and alienation by emphasizing skills, identities and aspirations associated with urban, middle-class lifestyles—in other words, aspects which their

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<sup>57</sup> In 2006, SIDH was operating eight village schools (three pre-primary and five primary schools), and one semi-rural middle-school.

<sup>58</sup> For example, on a visit to the inter college at Thatyur, I found the student taking externally-scheduled exams on the day of a significant local festival. The principal said that he tried to give a 'Vivekananda Day' (holiday given at the discretion of school principals), yet was unable to do so when exams had been scheduled.

own lives appear to lack. Central to this is the absence and denigration of manual work (cf. Balagopalan 2008; Kumar 2000; Sarangapani 2003), but also spaces for performing and valuing local cultural expressions. SIDH's interventions therefore attempted to counter a culture of 'backwardness' marked by "acute self-awareness of temporal and spatial marginality" (Gupta 1998:11)<sup>59</sup> in villages in Jaunpur by providing school-based education that was both locally relevant and of high pedagogic quality.

The lack of relevance of modern education and its role in reproducing marginality in rural India has been recognized in academic and policy debates (cf. Balagopalan 2005; Kumar 1988), yet due to colonial genealogies of the education system in India as well as postcolonial imperatives of development, the form and content of school-based education—and its assumed link to social mobility and opportunity—has largely gone unchallenged in schooling practices.<sup>60</sup> In this context, SIDH's interventions represented an anomaly: a rare challenge to commonsense assumptions about the inherently empowering role of modern education-as-development, as practiced in mainstream schools in India. Drawing significantly on Gandhi's critique of the epistemic and psycho-cultural effects of colonial education, SIDH's discourse focused on how, within a larger framework of 'development', education has become a marker of identity and subjectivity in postcolonial contexts (cf. Ciotti 2006; Klenk 2003; Jeffrey et al. 2008). SIDH argued that this was a form of 'mental colonization' that hindered critical evaluation as well as self-confidence. While the organization went through changes over the years, this critique of

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<sup>59</sup>cf. Kumar (1988) on 'teaching backwardness', and Pigg (1992) and Liechty (2003) on discourses of 'backwardness' in similar mountain contexts in Nepal.

<sup>60</sup> SIDH had conducted an informal survey of textbooks from a variety of schools using different textbooks, and found modernist assumptions pervasive to all. Similarly, Froerer (2007) notes that while stressing 'Indian values', normative imperatives of social mobility frame evaluations of education in right-wing Hindu schools as well.

the material and cultural implications of a modern paradigm of education and development was always its core focus. As such, my experiences at SIDH had led me to believe that while SIDH's founders and some members at times articulated an extreme, abstract 'anti-development' position, it was nuanced by contextual work: by ongoing, reflexive re-evaluations, pedagogical encounters as well as openness to experimentation. Re-visioning education is arguably a key 'ethical-political task of our postcolonial present' (Scott 1996), and SIDH had built a strong reputation as a critical space for dialogue and activism, inspiring many visitors and supportive interlocutors—myself included. It was, for a period of time, a 'space of hope' (Harvey 2000).

**From my fieldnotes; visit to SIDH's primary school in Kandikhal village, November 24<sup>th</sup> 2006:**

The children have an assembly every morning, and they all seemed to enjoy that a lot. They sing songs, perform dances, plays... I saw one group that was responsible for tomorrow's assembly practicing after school; that group stays behind for half an hour or so. They put on a bit of a show for me. One girl sang a song, which Kamla *didi* told us was about the sadness of girls who have to go to their husbands home and leave their families, 'why has god left girls to this fate..'. Several girls performed dances, some looked more traditional, others looked *filmi*, some *Punjabi*-type *bhangra* ones. Kamla *didi* said they learn them from here and there, some "from CDs that they all watch these days". Then they put on a *naatak*, a play, that was interesting. First they gathered around for a few minutes, planning. Kamla *didi* suggested that all the boys could be trees, since they weren't doing much else (they hadn't participated at all thus far, a few younger boys, though I noticed that they were singing along with each song and dance number from the sidelines). Then each child stepped forward and said that they would be in the play. The trees spread out, on Kamla's *didi*'s prompting, with their arms waving in the air. There was a *raja* (played by a girl) who told his servant to gather wood in the forest. The servant (a little boy) started hacking at the legs of trees, who fell down. Then he met the *vandevi* (forest goddess) who asked him what he was doing, he told her, and she said that he should not cut down all the trees. Then he went back to the *raja*, who was crying with a sore on her arm. The servant took the *raja* to a *ved* (traditional healer), who told them to apply *neem* and some other leaves. So the servant went to collect them from the forest. He then met the *vandevi* who asked what was wrong, he told her, and she said that if you had cut down all the trees, you wouldn't have gotten the medicinal leaves. The servant and the *raja* promised to protect the trees.. The children were all smiling and laughing all along.

Figure 23: Fieldnote excerpt visit to SIDH school, Kandikhal.



Figure 24: Children performing Jaunpuri folk dances, SIDH primary school, Nautha village.

Yet when I re-encountered SIDH in 2006 to conduct my dissertation fieldwork in Jaunpur, I found an organization in many ways struggling with its purpose and practice. During much of the time between August 2006 and December 2008, SIDH's campus in Kempty was my base, and I was at hand to witness a tumultuous period in the organization's history. My research was about the concerns that SIDH dealt with (and included SIDH schools as part of the educational field in Jaunpur), yet I did not think of it as being about the organization per se. As a trusted and valued friend and associate, I was generally welcome to observe and participate in a series of internal and external reviews, extended dialogue meetings, as well as countless informal discussions that took place in 2007 and 2008. In these forums, ideological, practical and personal questions were raised about what the organization should be doing and how. I mostly participated as an observer, though I shared my views openly in conversations with the organization's staff and leadership, and, occasionally, in the form of written feed-back.

As part of my field research, I was also a regular visitor to SIDH's village schools and interacted with teachers, hence discussing and hearing their perspectives outside the formal space

of institutional meetings. I was often accompanied by Shobhan Singh Negi, a senior SIDH staff member who had in 2006 left the organization in order to pursue independent work on education, livelihood and local governance, and was able to assist me part-time with my research. During long walks to and from villages in the valley, Shobhan and I often ended up talking about SIDH's work and changes in the organization; hence Shobhan's self-reflexivity and articulateness, along with his status as 'insider/outsider' at SIDH, contributed valuable perspectives on these processes. Overall, I heard how varying, and at times conflicting, expectations and experiences of SIDH were being articulated, reflecting different personal aspirations and capacities, as well as organizational and philosophical visions. These remained largely unresolved and ultimately resulted in most of the senior staff leaving the organization by 2009. Today, SIDH is still registered as a non-profit organization, but from what I hear, its operations are almost entirely defunct.

In this context, my account of SIDH—an implicit research site, and one of significant investment and loss—is therefore inevitably a personal story, that reflects both my own considerable involvement and the struggles and negotiations of those engaged—many for over twenty years of their lives—in the organization as school teachers, administrative staff, and leaders. In this chapter, my vantage point as a researcher therefore shifts somewhat. The boundaries between 'social investigation' and 'lived experience' are less distinguishable (cf. Mosse 2005).<sup>61</sup> Hence I also feel an urgent responsibility to try to tell this story in a way that utilizes ethnographic honesty to recognize the humanity of the actors involved, and reflects on relationships between personal troubles and social and political processes. If there are lessons to

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<sup>61</sup> See Appendix A for more detailed reflections on research methods, particularly how my long-term relationship with SIDH and the assistance of Shobhan shaped my research experiences.

be learnt from SIDH's story, they are not about individual faults but rather suggest more generalized incompetence in dealing with critical challenges of our age, thus hopefully also indicating ways of increasing such competencies.

### *The Life-cycle of an NGO*

As an institutional trajectory, SIDH's story can be told as one of a development NGO, as it resonates with but also complicates a fairly 'typical' NGO trajectory in the Indian context. This is one in which civil society activism was channeled into regulated social service organizations—a process known as NGO-ization—in the late 1980's, a context where the decline of the left as an alternative social vision was seen as a historical fact. This process was therefore a part of the emerging neo-liberal development paradigm, which included a shift towards privatization of state development projects and services (cf. Feldman 1997). In India, the liberalization of the Indian economy thus coincided with the founding of scores of NGO's in the late 1980's and early 1990's, many by well-intended, and often charismatic, highly educated young people from urban backgrounds such as Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi, SIDH's founding couple.<sup>62</sup> Pawan Gupta left a lucrative family business, and Anuradha Joshi her graduate studies, to move to the foothills of the Himalayas and pursue what they saw as 'more meaningful work'. Funding was relatively easy to access, and it seemed like there was lots of work to be done, places and people who needed help to 'develop'. In starting SIDH, Pawan

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<sup>62</sup> It should be specified that when I speak of 'leadership perceptions', I reference Pawan Gupta's opinions, as he was the de-facto leader of the organization. While Pawan Gupta (SIDH co-founder and Director) and his wife (SIDH co-founder and Treasurer of the SIDH board) Anuradha Joshi generally shared broad views on the organization and its trajectory, their opinions sometimes also differed significantly.

Gupta and Anuradha Joshi recruited a small team of local youth to work with them in the Jaunpur Block of Tehri Gahrwal district, Uttarakhand. Their work was centered around a group of small villages dotting the hillside around the qasba of Kempty, in the Aglar river valley, located about ten kilometers from the couple's new home in the hill station of Mussoorie.

In recounting the story of the organization, Pawan Gupta, Anuradha Joshi and others stress their journey as one of significant learning and growth. They thus began with the common assumptions of a service-providing NGO; that is by bringing in expertise and funds, they could help the poor people of this backward mountain region improve their lives. Initially, their focus was therefore not just on education but on a range of social and environmental projects, from vegetable seed distribution to women's self-help groups and watershed management. During the initial years, their 'office' was in a village and they all, including Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi, spent significant time acquainting themselves with villages in the valley. Based on these experiences, by 1996 they decided to focus entirely on quality education—as a practice that could institute lasting change—and had also begun to critique the dominant development paradigm. This shift in focus coincided with a broader disillusionment with the 'NGO-space' due to the relations of dependence it produced and reproduced in relation to (often foreign) funders as well as local communities, and the need to continuously devise projects that fit with the latest 'development-speak' in order to continue this cycle of funding. Hence SIDH, like many other organizations, attempted to distance themselves from the organizational identity of an NGO. This entailed working towards financial self-sufficiency through the creation of a 'corpus fund' as well as small-scale income generating activities, and a focus on 'integrated development' through philosophical understandings of self and social development rather than project-driven interventions. Gradually, it also came to mean increasing attention to advocacy

and teacher training as well as self-transformation workshops—primarily with people coming to SIDH from outside the region—rather than local ‘community work’ through village schools. Yet as I show, alternate institutional cultures were not easy to cultivate and maintain, due to historical constraints of particular institutional forms, the varied expectations and habits of individuals involved, and changing contexts.

Today, many NGO-founders have aged, become disillusioned, even bitter, and tired. Yet there is a pattern of a lack of devolvement of leadership, reflecting limitations in nurturing and empowering a second generation of organizational leadership. SIDH had worked hard to shed its identity as an ‘NGO’, yet had largely maintained a hierarchical style of management and seeming divide between staff members ideologically and practically committed to this new vision and those seen as ‘employees’, mainly working for a salary. A team of local youth had emerged as significant critical and skilled individuals in their own right, and Pawan Gupta was keen to ‘retire’ from the management of SIDH by 2007. SIDH was undoubtedly always ‘leadership-driven’, in that its founders were charismatic ideological and capable administrative leaders, yet many also admired them for the strong team of staff that they had nurtured. However, SIDH too failed to maintain its organizational life beyond the first generation of leadership; a brief attempt at devolved leadership ended with all-round feelings of distrust and disappointment. While ideologically committed to SIDH’s ‘core values’, many of these staff were now negotiating varied demands and constraints of family life and/or organizational work responsibilities with sustainable lifestyle and activist interests and commitments, and therefore had varied visions for SIDH’s future.

SIDH’s trajectory, and ultimate decline as an organization, does include processes that mark a broader ‘crisis’ of the Indian NGO sector. The internal decline of NGOs has also been



exacerbated by a drastic reduction in international development funding with the global financial crisis. Yet I suggest that concluding an analysis at this limits understanding of both the particularities of SIDH's case, as well as how they resonate with broader tensions of development. Hence, I instead stress that the substantive issues at stake reflect the continued reverberation of historical struggles with(in) modern institutions and projects—yet also take on dynamics which are both particular to postcolonial contexts, as well as to contemporary India and the rural, mountain locale of my research.

### *Fighting the Tide...*

In this chapter, I draw on my decade-long intellectual and personal engagement with SIDH to analyze both its promise and decline, emphasizing not 'crisis' or 'failure' but the fraught nature of experimentation as practiced in relation to dominant social ideologies, projects and structures. SIDH's journey to me represents diverse and creative ways in which the limits of possibility can be stretched, yet it also highlights the tensions of critical struggles against development (McMichael 2010), as they work within/against a discursive field and material conditions structured by colonial and postcolonial modernities and their expressions as discourses and practices of development. As the opening quote of my essay suggests, at stake are therefore tensions and contradictions that characterize projects 'working against the grain' of capitalist modernity and its manifestations as development. In particular, SIDH's negotiations are a reminder of the fine line between providing a space of hope and transformation, and of experiences of disappointment and closure; between discursive and material terms of engagement and the histories they draw on, reproduce, and what they mean for projects of social transformation.

In trying to make sense of what he described as the ‘limited critical impacts’ of SIDH’s interventions through schools, Pawan Gupta told me in 2006 that “the tide of the dominant forces is just too strong”. Other SIDH staff also articulated individual as well as institutional shortcomings in terms of a “lack of space” for alternatives to mainstream development. This sense of the overwhelming nature of ‘dominant forces’—described by a SIDH teacher as ‘the tide of development’—such as aspirations to urban lives, forms of employment and consumerism – reference the seductions of capitalist modernity, particularly powerfully experienced in the neo-liberal, consumerist economy of post-liberalization India. In many ways, rural Jaunpur in 1989, when SIDH began its work, and in 2006 were very different material and cultural landscapes, reflecting impacts of policies as well as social trends at the micro-level. The formation of Uttarakhand as an independent state in 2000 coalesced with, and in many ways appeared to reinforce, the increasing privatization of life under a program of liberalization that began in 1991. The formation of Uttarakhand also brought with it a broad extension of state development services, so that SIDH schools were now in direct competition with government schools in villages where none had previously existed.<sup>63</sup> Within SIDH, changes in cultural and material conditions of social reproduction in Jaunpur thus contributed to an unsettling of notions about purpose and practice—about why and how to affect progressive social change.

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<sup>63</sup> While it may seem that the extension of government services is contradictory to the privatizing impulses of neo-liberal development, in practice they seem to work closely together. Above all, the extension of government services and schemes translates into infusion of relatively large amounts of capital into communities; hence contributing to the monetization of social life, especially in a context where private opportunities for generation of wealth and consumption are increasingly seen as legitimate and desirable. Thus, people spoke of increasing availability and acceptance of various forms of ‘*private*’ employment as an important change in the region. In Jaunpur, I noted a major preoccupation with ‘*thekedari*’, or contracting, as capturing a government contract was a key means to make quick and easy money. As much an object of attention was the wide-spread corruption that characterizes this politics of contracting and patronage: I heard estimates that more than half of funds earmarked for various government projects are ‘eaten’, literally, by elected officials and bureaucrats.

On the one hand, SIDH's critique of development and education seemed more relevant than ever. By raising questions about value—what do people have reason to value?—and proposing alternative notions of human worth to counter the alienation that comes with a fetishization of exchange value, they presented a key challenge to the market episteme. In this context, many local members of SIDH's team had found the organization's discourse and the philosophies that it drew on empowering as an alternate framework for evaluating human purpose and relationships. Yet at the same time they spoke of a 'lack of space' to practice and institute alternatives, as material and cultural changes in the villages of Jaunpur resonated in their own lives and families. Such contradictions arguably reflect broader tensions between 'valorised modes of production and the explosion of new modes of consumption, between obligations of kinship (and, in SIDH's case, organizational commitment) and aspirations for private accumulation' (Weiss 2004). As Weiss (2004) has suggested, the weight of these contradictions may be experienced as a 'collapse of potentiality' (p. 10). Hence while recognizing multivalences of value, SIDH's interventions failed to find concrete points of anchorage that allowed them to materialize and flourish as alternative social institutions and practices, in a context of increasing commoditization of life and fetishization of capital.

I therefore locate SIDH's story in relation to a neo-liberal closure for particular kinds of oppositional interventions, as well as the challenges of evolving critical yet inclusive terms of recognition and tactics in this context (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006). In doing so, I reference key analytics of tensions of development, that highlight how they are shaped as historical and cultural projects and processes. Hence overlapping scholarship explicating the colonality of power, post-development and the micro/cultural politics of development helps me to locate SIDH as a critical struggle against development in a broader context of modernity, and to

account for both the potentials and limitations of its discursive and practical interventions. Such conceptual tools interject questions about history, culture and subjectivity in my telling of SIDH's story. It is a story which expresses tensions between theory and practice of development and education on a micro-level, among a small group of individuals and village communities in a mountain valley in north India. Yet taken together, these conceptual frameworks help me see how such tensions are shaped by, and give concrete shape to, broader processes, constraints, and perhaps, possibilities.

SIDH's story highlights education as key to a 'postcolonial condition', as "institutions and discourses which positions subjects and which configure their experiences in particular ways" (Gupta 1998:10). It thereby also indicates the significance of post-development perspectives in their attention to the politics of ontology, as well as limitations for concrete practices and engagements. Arguably, SIDH's experiences and negotiations resound with continuing 'tensions of empire' (Stoler and Cooper 1997); of situating a project in opposition to historical relations of rule, without being subsumed by the logics of such projects. Thus, they indicate for example how post-development critiques of development discourse have failed to produce an alternative theory of knowledge (cf. Elyachar 2012), instead tending to reproduce historical determinism and abstraction in locating 'the West' as the source of modernity and colonial rule as the key moment of social rupture. (cf. Gupta 1998; Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003; Watts 1995). Hence such representations add to the effect of 'reality' of the categories of dominant discourses (cf. Mitchell 2000), thereby enframing alternative visions as well. The result is a reproduction of dualist categories of modernist, positivist knowledge, such as 'the West' and 'India', 'urban' and 'rural', and 'modern' and 'tradition' as discrete spatial and essential cultural entities, rather than as complexly experienced and changing categories of

identity and meaning. As Saldana-Portillo (2003) has illustrated “the problem is not with progress per se but with the *mode* of progressive movement--...with the theory of human agency and model of subjectivity—that has underwritten the discursive collusion between the age of development and the revolutionary movements therein” (Saldana Portillo 2003:5). Such scholarship therefore highlights the need to be attentive to the shared normative theory of human agency, subjectivity and transformation in developmental and oppositional discourse, and their roots in colonial legacies.<sup>64</sup>

The ‘unfinished business’ (Burton 1999) of colonial modernity, or ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000), thus continues to resonate, as “tropes of ‘rhetoric of empire’” are configured and attached to particular development discourses (Watts 1995:49). Yet while colonial categories and dichotomies—such as modernity and tradition—endure, the problem for projects such as SIDH which base an oppositional politics on such a critique is that people’s lives do not fit in this narrow framework (cf. Dube 2008; Gupta 1998; Klenk 2003; Stoler and Cooper 1997). As I show through the following sections of this chapter, the deployment of a discourse of anti-colonial modernity objectifies historical subjectivity, thereby denying the co-existence of multiple forms of association, choices, and meanings of culture. To counter such closure, I therefore reiterate the analytic significance of the fact that, as negotiated projects and processes, ‘development is anchored not just in institutions and practices, but also in the lives of its subjects’ (Pieterse 1996), including the lives of its “practitioners” (Mosse 2005), in relation to diverse subject-positions, place-specific realities and power-relations (cf. Baviskar 2007; Klenk

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<sup>64</sup> As I subsequently elaborate on, SIDH’s interventions presented potential alternatives to a liberal vision of the development of autonomous, self-determining individuals. Yet arguably the imposition of an essentialized, valorized notion of ‘tradition’ as an alternate subject position is another inheritance from modernist development thinking.

2003; Moore 1997; Mosse 2005). Such perspectives remain open to possibilities that people may aspire to modernity without Western lives (Gupta 1997), or the varied and localized reasons that people have for desiring development (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003). In other words, they suggest the need for analytic and political spaces for the varied ways in which people seek and experience social change.

The first section presents a detailed examination of SIDH's leadership's discursive framings of the organization and its work. I lay out SIDH's leadership's commitment to creating an 'alternate epistemic space', and examine the philosophical genealogy and implications of this goal. I discuss tensions as well as overlaps between two key influences: Gandhi and neo-Gandhian thought, and *Jeevan Vidya*, a humanist universalist philosophical framework. I suggest that these philosophical traditions, and SIDH's insistence on focusing on ontology, provide rich visions for social change, yet as cultural and material practice entail various constraints.

The second and third sections of the chapter highlight how discursive and philosophical positions become imbued with specific, and often contradictory, meanings in relation to quotidian experiences of identity and livelihood (cf. Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). I do so by looking at the competing, at times conflicting, expectations and experiences of SIDH staff and teachers, and the terms of contention that they represent in relation to the organization's 'core values' and practice, and as they resonate with changing terms of social reproduction. Firstly, I examine SIDH staff and village school teachers' contradictory assessments of the viability and desirability of agrarian livelihoods, and secondly, I analyze contention within the organization over SIDH's new "Model School", an "English-medium" pre-primary and primary school located on SIDH's semi-rural campus in Kempty. These negotiations and conflicts

caused significant discord, doubt, even disillusionment and despair for those involved, and ultimately contributed to the disbanding of the organization. Yet perspectives on development as lived experience also make visible positive lessons that can be gleaned from SIDH's story, highlighting that "...moments of contradiction can be moments of possibility for the generation of new meanings, choices and trajectories of action" (Klenk 2003:119).

*“A Community of Seekers”: The Search for an Alternative Epistemic Space*

In his introductory comments at a conference organized by SIDH on the theme of ‘Education, Modernity and Development’ in June of 2007,<sup>65</sup> Pawan Gupta argued that

If this is development, we are unable to deal with fundamental problems. It’s the same with education as with medicine, technology, law... trying to solve one problem, but creating bigger problems and continuously trouble-shooting. This keeps going on. We have to conceive of a different world, where we can live in harmony, co-existence, prosperity, happiness...

There is no major debate on education, so education has become the hand-maiden of this whole system. Things will operate by the laws of the system, and individuals have assumed they are nothing in this. We have come to accept this imposed system, whether it does us right or wrong... Any changes or rights that we want, we demand within this system. But we feel that the problem is with the paradigm itself. So we *have to step out to see this*. In this we have two major guides: Gandhiji and Jeevan Vidya.

As a part of his concluding comments to the same conference, Pawan Gupta put things in slightly different terms:

We are all stuck, all of us... The solution is to understand what is here, *aaj ki sthiti*, the situation in the present. We are all stuck in modernity, and feel the need to justify everything we do. For example the influence of English... We have become slaves to technology, facilities. Most of us are not able to assess what our essential needs are. I am stuck just like everyone else. We are trying to negotiate, find a way out. Yet our work cannot be based merely on idealism. We have to look to what is ours (*apna*), as a source of strength. Tradition. What is innate, inherent, constant, naturally acceptable.

The first comments sum up SIDH’s critical discourse on a dominant model of development: it is inherently flawed and hence cannot serve as a basis for fundamental social change. Here, Pawan Gupta presents an epistemic critique<sup>66</sup> of the assumptions of modernity as expressed in development and education systems in India, and argues for the need for a change in paradigms rather than trying to endlessly tinker with the system, as current development

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<sup>65</sup> Pawan Gupta’s talk, like most of the proceedings of this two-day conference, was presented in Hindi.

<sup>66</sup> “An episteme is an approach to knowledge about the world, based on a core set of assumptions that seem like commonsense” (McMichael 2010:3).



practices are the source of problems rather than solutions. Mahatma Gandhi and *Jeevan Vidya*, a humanist universal philosophical movement, are presented as SIDH's guides in this search for real solutions, in 'conceiving a different world'. Yet while the focus in the second comments remains on the destructive effects of an 'imposed system' and hence the search for alternatives external to this, the tone is markedly more pessimistic. Here, the use of terms such as 'being stuck', 'being slaves to', and 'trying to find a way out' emphasizes a deep despair, sense of crisis and the overwhelming power of modernity. From this stand point, solutions are framed squarely in terms of 'our own' traditions and strengths rather than 'idealism'.

During the course of my field work, SIDH's educational and developmental philosophy thus reflected two different, even competing, visions for critical engagement with 'dominant systems': one is a universalist/transcendental vision seeking to empower individuals to critically engage with and find solutions to problems of contemporary reality through a realization of human potential; the second a "decolonizing" vision driven by a desire for psychological and cultural 'decolonization', and a revival of 'Indian' or 'traditional' values and knowledge. The first—*Jeevan Vidya*—critiques modernity as a suboptimal, exploitation-based way of organizing human relationships and human-environment relationships, yet attempts to draw out solutions from a common understanding of humanness rather than cultural or historically-specific traits and histories. The second—a neo-Gandhian discourse<sup>67</sup>—is explicitly anti-modernity, stressing that colonialism has led to a co-opting and unmooring of people from their own traditions, hence a need to 're-tie', often by disciplinary means that may include the need for violent destruction of

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<sup>67</sup> By 'neo-Gandhian', I refer to contemporary individuals and critical discourses inspired by Gandhi, but also other ideologies and influences. In contrast, 'Gandhians' refers generally to contemporaries and direct followers of Gandhi, whom would usually follow Gandhian principles and practices (such as spinning and wearing *khadi* cloth, and *ashram* living) in their everyday lives.

‘alien’ systems. Hence, while there are points of convergence, these visions differ in how they cast the role of culture and the past in sculpting of (better) futures. In this section, I examine these philosophical discourses, how they shaped the terms of reference in SIDH’s call for an epistemic shift, and the implications for practice.



Figure 25: Pawan Gupta speaking at a conference organized by SIDH on “Education, Modernity and Development”

As such, philosophical discourses were central to SIDH’s self-image and trajectory—one one occasion Pawan Gupta referred to the organization as a “community of seekers”—and taking these into account—as historical, relational constructs that played out in the lives of the institution as well as the individuals involved rather than as abstract positions—is important to the story I tell here. Arguably, the hardening of philosophical positions, and, as I elaborate on throughout this paper, conflicts that took the form of “... ‘small wars’ over who is believed to have internalized ‘modernity’ or ‘tradition’ most comprehensively ...” (Jeffrey et al. 2008:22), were key to the subsequent dissolution of SIDH.

*Philosophical genealogies: Gandhi's critique of colonial modernity and neo-Gandhian interpretations*

At the core of SIDH's educational philosophy had been a strong conviction about the continued relevance of Gandhi's critiques of modern education, as a part of institutional and cultural systems constituting a 'Western modernity' at large. Gandhi had identified education as part of a 'liberal ensemble of institutions and practices' (Skaria 2008:210) used by the British to establish and maintain imperial rule. He critiqued education as a particularly insidious institution, used to establish the hegemony of 'Western modernity', or notions of culture, governance and development among educated Indians (Gandhi 1958 V.67). Hence, he argued that a critique of the colonial education system was an essential aspect of the struggle for political independence from the British and from a colonial system of dependence. His point of view was anomalous among the educated and elite leaders of the Indian nationalist movement who were, like Gandhi himself, products of a colonial system of education, and had been deeply influenced by the ideologies of industrial modernization. Thus, for example, when Gandhi urged students to leave government educational institutions during the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920, he did so without the support of several important leaders of the movement.

In arguing that modern education shapes our assumptions without our being aware of it, SIDH was therefore referencing Gandhi's critique, as he argued that the regulation of terms of knowledge was more paralyzing than rule by violence, because it was unrecognizable as such. Gandhi had pointed out the role of education in maintaining colonial hegemony, in that not only did the maintenance of colonial institutions depend on the cultivation of particular skills among educated subjects, but education also produced and legitimized particular forms of social relations ranging from the organization of the family to forms of governance. A model of education aimed to 'turn us all into clerks' would therefore contribute to socio-economic

inequalities, as well as to a growing socio-cultural divide between those educated and uneducated. Gandhi stressed that this divide results in a view of the 'other' based on contempt and suspicion, hinders communication and relationships, and inevitably counteracts the possibilities for just governance and positive social change (Gandhi 1958 V.13). Hence Gandhi was making an argument about a direct link between *appropriate* education and social relationships that could serve as the basis for a just system of governance. For example, he felt that appropriate education could contribute to making the *panchayat* system (of village-based, decentralized government) a strong and viable model of government, marking 'village *swaraj*', or self-rule, as the model for true independence of the future Indian state (ibid. V.13).

Hence Gandhi's critique of the colonial system of education was political and psycho-cultural, but also drew significantly on an ethical/moral discourse. Based on the ideal of 'swaraj', or 'true freedom', Gandhi stressed that 'real education' should be a means toward all forms of freedom, beginning with the basic economic and socio-political freedoms which he saw as necessary preconditions for a more spiritual sense of liberation. The ability to make a living was envisioned as an easy goal to achieve; beyond this Gandhi stressed that a more comprehensive aim of education was the cultivation of morality, social values, and dedication in individuals to work for a better society.<sup>68</sup> Gandhi's critique and vision of alternatives thus

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<sup>68</sup> Gandhi initiated two experiments to institutionalize his alternative vision of education, in the form of 'national education' and 'basic education'. 'National education' schools came to the forefront of the nationalist movement during the non-cooperation movement in 1920-21, when Gandhi urged students to boycott government educational institutions. The explicit aims of national schools were to provide alternative institutions during the non-cooperation boycott, an atmosphere of freedom for all students, including untouchables, and a 'nationally appropriate' curriculum. By the latter, Gandhi meant that education would have to be conducted in the vernacular language of the region rather than English; would have to entail a decentralized notion of discipline rather than one based on hierarchy and coercion; would include students in the formation of the content of schooling, and entail an equal emphasis on literary training and skills in agriculture, crafts and other traditional livelihood practices (Gandhi 1958 V.13). In

resonated particularly with SIDH's leadership as it seemed to encompass both the material and moral forms of alienation that mothers of educated youth in Jaunpur were experiencing; it also spoke to a general sense of the ethical depravity of modern life—or voids that they experienced directly in their own lives. Hence, Gandhi's discourse on education for *swaraj* served as a basis for SIDH's attention to relationships between self- and social- development—reflected particularly in a stress on philosophical 'clarity' and grounding.

Despite Gandhi's emphasis on education as a potentially powerful tool for social transformation for independent India, his practical interventions were quickly sidelined and dismissed as irrelevant for a 'modern' society (cf. Kumar 1996). In locating their critique of modern education in relation to Gandhi's, SIDH therefore engaged with a history of critique of the material and epistemological limits of modern development, substantive proposal of alternatives, and their limited practical recognition. Such histories leave significant traces for thinking about how dominant notions of education have become 'common-sense'—as part of larger negotiations over the model of development appropriate for the postcolonial Indian state—through practices of state formation (Morarji 2005), yet have also shaped terms of contestations. Hence, "Critical perspectives on education, nationalism, and modernity are in the foreground of historical and contemporary debates in India regarding alternative education programs for rural students..." (Klenk 2003:103); as are quests for visions of "postcolonial modernity that would be specifically Indian" (Klenk 2003:102). As such, locating its critique in relation to Gandhi signaled a broader project against colonial modernity; hence as part of a broad field of

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the 1930s, Gandhi initiated a second experiment with education in the form of 'basic education'. As a part of a vision of decentralized governance and village-centered progress, 'basic education' equated education entirely with practical training in crafts, particularly weaving and spinning (cf. Fagg 2002).

‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000) and continuing ‘tensions of empire’ (Stoler and Cooper 1997). SIDH’s core concerns therefore also reverberate with post-development critiques and visions, which seek to counter the ontological violence of modern development, and instead strengthen local systems of knowledge, economy and work (cf. Banuri 1990; Escobar 1995).

For SIDH, a focus on the ontological foundations of modern education meant in turn that discursive critique was a necessary basis for practical intervention. At times, this informed incisive re-examinations of categories and social norms of modernization. An example is SIDH’s epistemic and social exposition of the term ‘child labour’; a term deployed in contemporary development discourse to naturalize the school as the antithesis to work and thus reproduce the hierarchical opposition of mental and manual labour (cf. Balagopalan 2005). As SIDH pointed out, the developmental ideal of the school is to distance the child from the world of labour; this also translates into looking down upon, and degrading, those who do manual work—including parents, community elders, and in particular, women. Such evaluations easily converge with views of what it means to be ‘human’, or to live with human dignity, as these become equated with doing non-manual labour jobs. As Balagopalan (2008) has similarly argued through a study of street children in Kolkata, this internalization of hegemonic views of meaningful and valuable work involves a deep violation, as it comes to mean the inferiorization of parents’ livelihoods as well as their own present and past realities. In Jaunpur, I heard this sense of violation in a male elder’s comments on educated youth: ‘We don’t understand what they understand, so they don’t think we understand anything...they don’t respect uneducated elders at all, they say “get out, you don’t know anything”’. Hence, drawing on Gandhi’s critique of the negative impact of modern institutions on social relations and the material power of terms of knowledge, SIDH too

supported the need to “interrogate assumptions of a normative childhood that the reified space of the school helps naturalize” (Balagopalan 2008:281).<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, SIDH had designed pedagogical exercises to provoke critical thinking on assumptions around modern education and development. In a public speech, Pawan Gupta gave the following example of an exercise conducted with youth in Jaunpur:

We did an experiment with 12<sup>th</sup> pass kids from this area, where we showed them two advertisements with “smartly” dressed men in western clothing. We asked them to write something about these pictures. All wrote that these were educated, civilized men. There was no way you could know this from looking at these pictures... Then we asked, if these men came knocking on your door on a rainy day in your village what would you do? They all said, invite them in, feed them etc. We then asked, do you think they would do the same if you knocked on their door in the city? They all said ‘no’... So we have these assumptions about people based on appearances, like dress and English...

This exercise was clearly intended to highlight how assumptions of modernity unknowingly shape people’s perceptions and evaluations; here the respondents unquestioningly equate material prosperity with moral value until they are confronted with a concrete situational example that pushes them to distinguish the two. On several occasions, I saw SIDH staff members conduct similar exercises with local youth and teachers, and while they were designed to elicit a particular response, they did always appear to provoke critical thought among participants. Yet at times, critiques of the value systems of modernity led to valorized notions of traditional systems and villages. Hence while powerful as experimental practice to encourage

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<sup>69</sup> SIDH had raised similar questions about normative meanings and assessment of ‘family’, and how developmental, middle-class norms about family size, composition and ideals of ‘autonomy’ may be negatively effecting local communities in Jaunpur (SIDH 2002). They showed that in a mountain, sustenance agrarian economy, the joint family is key to viability. Nuclear families are not able to cope with the varied work demands of such an economy. SIDH in fact arrived at some startling facts when looking into school absenteeism and drop-outs from their schools. They found that all school drop outs came from nuclear family households; the reasons cited for their withdrawal from school was that their labour was needed at home.

critical reflexivity, they also often were led to a conclusion that invoked oppositional categories and essentialized identities, expressed in terms of anti-Western and anti-modernity discourse.



**Excerpt from my field-notes from a SIDH teacher training workshop led by Pawan Gupta, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006:**

At one point in the workshop, participants were asked to do an interesting exercise. They were divided into two groups and each group was given a section/lesson/a few images from a textbook to look at. They were asked to consider what a first impression of a rural child might be upon seeing the images/reading the text. The two lessons of that the group I sat with had to do with going to the city, and talking about pollution and health. In the first one, a boy from a village is going to visit the city with his uncle, and is looking out of the bus window at the wonders of the *sheher* (city): chimneys, tall buildings, crowds, motor vehicles so that everyone can get to their work speedily, hospital etc. This is all mentioned explicitly in the description of the scene, along with the presence of other facilities/benefits of the city—including shopping and TV. There is a brief mention of pollution, that the air is dirty and dusty. Otherwise everything is positive.

In the second lesson, a child goes to the doctor because he is sick. The doctor asks him if he has eaten *laddoo* (sweets), the boy says yes, and when asked where from says from the village sweet shop. The doctor admonishes him saying that flies sit on sweets in the village shop as they are not covered. Dirty places leads to sickness. The lesson then moves on rather abruptly to talk about the dirty water that the boy sees, and how it comes about (includes a polluting industry).

In the group discussion, there was a fair consensus that the general impression of the first lesson was that city is good (hence village is less good), and in the latter that village is dirty. One person pointed out that the questions following the lesson emphasize the positive aspects of city life. Also, it was commented on that the negatives of the city (pollution) was mentioned very briefly and in no detail. However, one participant—a female government school teacher who lives in Kempty but teaches in a village primary school in the valley—was very argumentative and said that “village are dirty” and cities are cleaner. In relation to the second lesson, there was therefore some discussion as to whether or not dirt is specific to villages, or was the lesson more about hygiene in general. But there was one telling line in the lesson, where the boy feels *sharm*, or embarrassment, in front of the doctor as he is being chastised for eating the dirty village *laddoo* that flies sit on. Somebody commented on this and its significance.

From this exercise, Pawanji stressed that these kinds of lessons present a false reality, thereby closing off learning and an openness for talking about how things really are. The discussion about the textbooks became draw out, as the argumentative female teacher from Kempty said that she saw the textbook lesson as well-represented. ‘If children read it, they would get good information about pollution, dirt etc.’ Pawanji responded quite forcefully that this lesson was oriented towards urban kids and was full of assumptions. ‘They never explain for example why trains are more necessary for cities than for rural areas, or why bullock carts may be fine for certain village level transport needs’. He also said that ‘no textbook story tells about what is used and consumed in cities, and the costs of such consumption’. He went on that ‘books show farming but not its relation to the food that we consume, hence children learn that food comes from shops. Why are there no lessons on a city child visiting a village and saying “oh, I didn’t know that milk comes from cows, I thought it comes from the shop”? ‘All this illustrates an urban, Western bias’.

Figure 26: Fieldnote excerpt SIDH teacher training workshop

The focus on discursive as well as nationalist-oriented neo-Gandhian critique at SIDH was strengthened by Pawan Gupta's relationship with Dharampal, a Gandhian historian and social critic, in the mid-1990s. Dharampal became a close friend and mentor, and hence had a significant impact on SIDH's discourse and focus. Using documents in the colonial archives, Dharampal had studied the impact of British rule on various indigenous institutions in India, including education. He had showed how an extensive and well-functioning system of village education was destroyed by colonial policies and practices (Dharampal 2007). Dharampal's analysis of historical changes as a result of colonial rule was driven by a nationalist vision and desire to reconstruct political, economic and cultural institutions of pre-colonial India. Drawing on the *Puranas*, he argued that the 'Indian civilizational worldview', defined by particular notions of mind, consciousness and flow of time, existed in conflict with a 'modern worldview' associated with the European Enlightenment, with its stress on reason, rationality, order and human control over nature. Here, modern education had become a key means of inculcating people into this modern world view, and the mandate of a critical education was to revive traditional consciousness as a means to 'view the world and present from the Indian perspective', and as a basis for self-confidence (Pimparé 2005). While the institutional form was important, a greater emphasis here was on the underlying epistemic system—or 'belief system'. SIDH's discourse hence also identified alienation as the experience of contradictions and conflicts resulting from living between and within two belief systems, the Indian one versus the modern-Western one —intimating a kind of false-consciousness. Hence they identified conflicts between people's 'beliefs' and their everyday experiences (for example the conflict between experiencing the alienating effects of schooling yet insisting on its value) as indicative of this 'clash of world-views'.

Dharampal's historical research is an important excavation of the colonial archive. At the same time, he has also been critiqued for his sympathies with Hindu right-wing ideology and politics, including his emphasis on the role of violence, power and destruction (rather than deconstruction) as basis for reconstruction. At SIDH, the stress on revival of 'tradition' and 'local knowledge' was in line with experiments that were already being conducted in their schools—particularly with place-based learning, incorporating traditional story-telling and folk songs, involving children in local research projects, and the kind of experimental exercises described above—yet under Dharampal's influence the rhetoric of the organization became increasingly anti-modern and anti-Western.<sup>70</sup> However, I came to understand that by 2006, partially due to Pawan Gupta's involvement in *Jeevan Vidya*, and for personal reasons (Dharampal was aged, ailing, and described as a very difficult person), the relationship with Dharampal had grown strained. Although Pawan Gupta's discourse continued to be marked by a Gandhian critique of colonial modernity, SIDH's overall discourse and focus had largely moved away from the revivalist discourse of Dharampal. Yet as I show below, Pawan Gupta was to re-emphasize this discourse as a part of a reassessment that began in 2007.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This also led to critical self-reflection about the fact that as an NGO, SIDH was partially supported by funding from foreign donors. Financially, the organization therefore attempted to move towards 'self-sufficiency' (this largely involved creating a corpus fund and drawing on interest for recurring expenses, the main being salaries), and increasingly described itself as a 'family' rather than an NGO.

<sup>71</sup> Following Dharampal's death in late 2006.

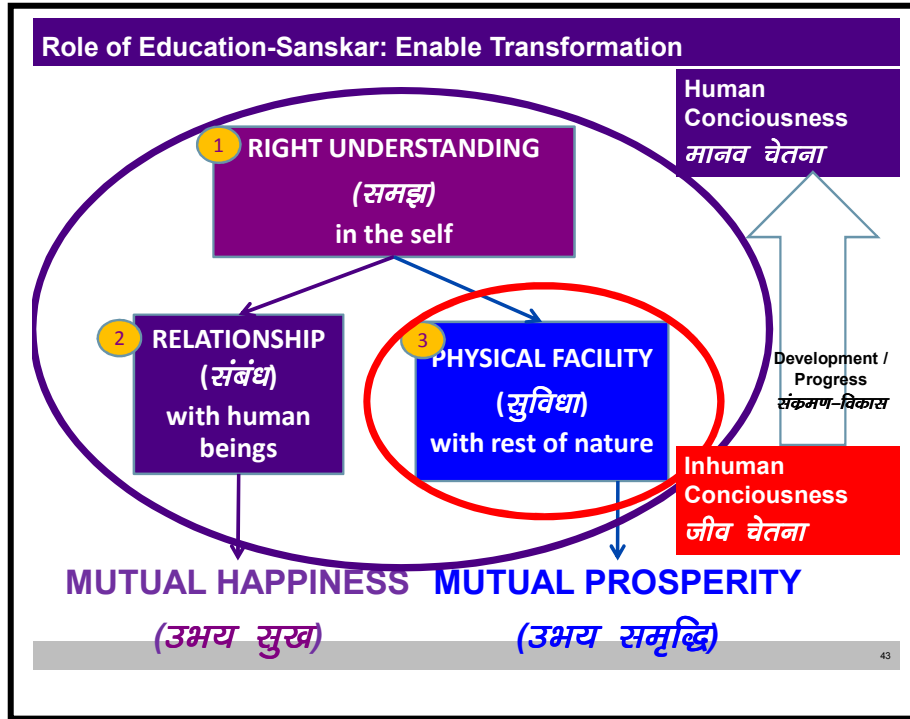


Figure 27: A diagram from a *Jeevan Vidya* ‘workshop’ showing ‘development’ or ‘progress’ as the movement from an exclusive preoccupation with *physical facilities* to a more holistic vision that includes *right understanding* and *relationships*. Participants in a *Jeevan Vidya* workshop are asked to examine their own lives and ask themselves how much of their time and energy they are currently devoting to working for ensuring physical facility and how much for ensuring relationships and right understanding.

In 2000, Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi were introduced to *Jeevan Vidya* (literally “Life Knowledge” or Understanding), a humanistic ethical/philosophical movement that has resonated with individuals working for holistic development, agriculture and education primarily in north India.<sup>72</sup> *Jeevan Vidya* is communicated through a seven-day workshop, and when I arrived at

<sup>72</sup> *Jeevan Vidya* is the popular name given to a humanistic ethico-philosophical approach known in Hindi/Sanskrit as *saha-astitvavaad* or ‘co-existentialism’. *Jeevan Vidya* is based on the (re)searches and insights of an ayurveda physician named Agrahari Nagraj Sharma (born 14 Jan 1920) in the decades preceding 1975. A. Nagraj, having been born in a family of Brahmins traditionally devoted to the study of

SIDH in 2006 to conduct my fieldwork, all SIDH staff had attended several of these workshops. In fact since 2002, the SIDH campus in Kempton had become a regular site for *Jeevan Vidya* workshops facilitated by Pawan Gupta as well as others from a network in north India in Hindi and English, and attracted participants from a variety of backgrounds, from all over the country. In introducing me to the philosophy and what it had meant for SIDH, Pawan Gupta described *Jeevan Vidya* as a 'paradigm shift proposing a re-evaluation of how we think of value, meaning not morality but *worth*'. On another occasion, Pawan Gupta thus described the significance of *Jeevan Vidya* for education: "Today's education is focused on comparison, hierarchy, distinction and appearances, instead of sameness, excellence and being. *It is therefore a complete shift in the value of education*". Pawan Gupta felt that while SIDH's previous attention to critiquing the assumptions of modern education and putting in place locally relevant curricula was in the right direction', 'it seemed incomplete', thus resonating with a recent observation by Elyachar (2012:119) that "the critiques of development did not present an alternative theory of knowledge". Hence he stressed that *Jeevan Vidya* represents a potentially alternative theory of knowledge from which to engage with overlapping questions of self and social development.

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vedic scriptures, had remained unsatisfied by the answers provided by his spiritual/religious tradition to the existential questions he was grappling with. Finally, through the adoption of certain fresh alternative approaches, his efforts bore fruit, and from 1975 onwards he began sharing his findings/insights with a growing circle of friends and seekers. In the 1990s a few academics from engineering/scientific backgrounds got interested in his findings and helped consolidate them into a more communicable 'workshop' format. Efforts for the sharing of *Jeevan Vidya* (which is usually communicated in the shape of immersive week-long workshops) are loosely facilitated by an informal cohort of about two dozen individuals (with varying degrees of institutional linkages) across the country, mostly in North India. Key loci of *Jeevan Vidya* activity are Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Kanpur and Bijnor (U.P.), Punjab, IIIT Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh). In the last ten years, *Jeevan Vidya* has also been part of the curriculum in certain university level (engineering/technical) institutions in India under the rubric Human Values and Professional Ethics. From 2013, the Royal University of Bhutan has made it a part of the curriculum in all its constituent institutions (Personal communication with Vinish Gupta; [http://nonspiritual.net/A\\_Nagraj\\_Sharma](http://nonspiritual.net/A_Nagraj_Sharma)).

The *Jeevan Vidya* framework is presented through a series of proposals that workshop participants are asked to examine by the facilitator.<sup>73</sup> These proposals outline key values, responsibilities and possibilities of human beings while situating these within essentially harmonious relationships between the 'self' and the 'body', between individuals, and at social, ecological and cosmological levels. It was also described as “solution-centered”, and as a holistic, humanistic philosophy, that has a universal vision emphasizing commonality through core human values rather than differences based on nationality, culture, caste etc. In many ways, it is a universal and utopic vision that potentially challenges deeply held assumptions about ways of being and becoming; of productivity and ethics.<sup>74</sup> *Jeevan Vidya* is also critical of modernity, and hence coalesced with SIDH’s ‘core values’, yet the bases and solutions differed (particularly from neo-Gandhian discourse). As Anuradha Joshi put it:

We have seen a conflict in people. They see the problem that education is not leading to jobs yet youth won’t return to farming; that education is associated with a breakdown of values and respect. Yet there is still a strong desire for schooling. It is like every woman will say that joint families are best for this agrarian context, where labor and people are needed. Yet they also want the privacy and control of a nuclear family set-up. These are dilemmas of modernity. Fundamentally, they are about the break-down of relationships. This is the focus of *JV*.

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<sup>73</sup> I have attended two *Jeevan Vidya* workshops, led by different facilitators, one held on the SIDH campus in 2007, and one in Hyderabad in 2008. I also attended parts of several workshops for teachers, youth and children at SIDH based on this framework. From this initial exposure, I found a focus on positive criticality, holism and relationships that is particularly meaningfully expressed in relation to the psychological, social and ecological crises of our age. I have seen how it serves as an empowering lens, especially for those who have not yet begun to examine such issues and how they relate to their lives. At the same time, I reflected on how the structural, ‘systems-oriented’ way in which the framework is conceptualized (designed, and largely delivered, by men with a background in engineering and technology), as well as the lecture-driven delivery method reflect continuities with modernist ontology and pedagogies that in turn limit potentials for embodied ethical practice.

<sup>74</sup> Although my knowledge of *Jeevan Vidya* as a discursive theory is limited, my overall sense is that it would qualify as a non-liberal movement because the goal is not the autonomy and freedom of the individual, but fulfillment of human values and relationships (cf. Mahmood 2005).

Here, Anuradha Joshi identifies the ‘dilemmas’ of modernity, but rather than attributing them to an essential clash of world-views, she draws on *Jeevan Vidya* to argue that the systems and institutions of modernity are contrary to goals of ‘harmony and co-existence at all levels’—central being human relationships. I was told that a senior figure in this philosophical movement has argued that the notion and feeling of equality that modernity promises should be recognized as positive. Another *Jeevan Vidya* workshop facilitator, and former SIDH staff member, suggested that ‘*JV* may present the possibility of coping with modernity’, and that it represents a ‘shift in perspective rather than critique’. Hence while *Jeevan Vidya* leads to critical evaluation of certain aspects of modern philosophy, systems and technologies, many involved in the movement do not stress an outright rejection of ‘modernity’ as an abstract category.<sup>75</sup>

In the *Jeevan Vidya* framework, significant emphasis is placed on self-evaluation and understanding as an essential basis for being able to take meaningful action. When I arrived at SIDH in 2006, many staff at SIDH expressed that this philosophical framework had ‘brought significant clarity’ to the organization and its individuals. A senior staff member told me that the focus now was “to create an environment here to help individuals to look within, to gain an understanding of things that are absolute and permanent as a basis for decisions, to create confidence and happiness”. At the time of my research, teachers and staff in SIDH were therefore actively engaged with trying to understand this ethical philosophy in relation to their own lives—their aspirations, physical and emotional needs, and the meaning of education.

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<sup>75</sup> Many of those involved with the movement, particularly as workshop facilitators, also occupy ambiguous positions in relation to modern systems and institutions of knowledge, as professors and researchers in engineering and technology institutes.

*Jeevan Vidya* had also inspired an increasing focus on teacher training and *Sahjan*, a short residential course on ‘value-education’ for school children open to all schools in the valley.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Workshops for teachers and children based on *Jeevan Vidya* were aimed to counter the perceived ‘external’ focus of modern education, which is premised on ‘learning about the world but not ourselves’. Teachers were thus told that the focus would be on *swayam ka adhyayan*, ‘self-examination’.



### **My reflections on SIDH's *Sahjan* program based on *Jeevan Vidya* written for Anuradha Joshi:**

SIDH's *Sahjan* (meaning 'together with people') value-education program is a unique program for children that draws on a range of creative teaching methods and mediums to create an inviting and open space for reflection and engagement. I observed two six-day sessions of the program in September and October of 2006. The program brought together middle-school children from government, NGO and private schools in the region to live and work together for six days on SIDH's new 'lower' campus. Overall, I understood the objective of the program to be for children to examine themselves, others, and their environment, and relationships between these spheres. This may sound like a nebulous task, but in practice it is a program that both draws on and extends children's experiences and skills in very concrete ways. So the program at once validates the experiences and skills that the children already have—some of which are universal, others of which are specific to the region and to their village lives—and builds on these rather than reinforcing what they lack or don't know. In this way, I saw a lot of positive reinforcement happening in the *Sahjan* sessions. Many of the children, particularly from government schools, are quite weak in their reading and writing skills. While particular sessions and activities emphasize building such skills, literacy and numeracy is not seen as a prerequisite for other forms of understanding of self, others and environment—but as one method/skills that helps them to explore, examine, analyze these things and their relationships. This contributes significantly to the relaxed, open environment that I felt in the *Sahjan* sessions. Often the children are very reluctant to speak on first day, as they are used to the repressive classroom environment and schooled notions of what is correct and incorrect. This is especially the case for girls. However, their reticence quickly dissipates, and by the last day there is a remarkable transformation in the confidence and joyfulness with which the children participate.

Apart from providing positive reinforcement and recognizing the multiple ways in which we experience and learn in life, the attention to feelings and affective states, as well as relationships, provides a space for questions that children have no opportunity to explore in their schools, and that people in general—regardless of their background—do very little reflecting on in their daily lives. A partially literate child from a village in Jaunpur needs this kind of space just as much as well "educated" person from a city or from the West. For example, it was remarkable to see the children reflecting on the following question (through an activity-based lesson): "How are our need for things and our need for feelings different"? This seems like a key question for our times! For any education program that aims to contribute to making the world a better place, the space to reflect on such 'simple but essential questions'—as Anuradha Joshi put it—is invaluable.

Pedagogically, *Sahjan* is an ambitious and challenging program. With the aim of building understanding of oneself and the world around, the facilitators work to point out and strengthen a range of skills and methods for doing so—ranging from self-reflection skills (e.g. meditation, diary-writing, sharing feelings about others, building friendships), to communication skills within and outside the classroom (listening; collaboration; questions; literacy and numeracy; theater, music, art), to critical thinking skills (media analysis; assessing information) and self-care skills (health, sewing, yoga). The fact that this list does not represent all the mediums used in *Sahjan*—and only represents a fraction of the possibilities—speaks to the creativity and potentials of the program.

There are a few things that I thought did not work so well: at times, the elicitation exercises seem to present the children with conclusions and feelings rather than allow them to arise, which makes the lesson seem moralistic rather than exploratory. Rather than a "proposal" to be examined, some of the lessons tend to come across as dogmatic. Even if one is bringing to their attention things that they already know, they need to come to arrive at that feeling of knowing on their own, otherwise it feels forced. I also feel like the lesson on literates/illiterates tends to valorize the lives and experiences of illiterates. Again, if the point is an open evaluation of literacy and illiteracy (or rural—urban) then the space needs to be provided for that kind of openness...

Figure 28: My reflections on SIDH's *Sahjan* Program.



Figure 29: Students attending a *Sahjan* course engaged in various activities

*Sahjan* as well as other programs at SIDH informed by *Jeevan Vidya* were undoubtedly ambitious, and at least in part successful, attempts to translate this philosophical framework into pedagogical practice. Yet overall, my impressions of the impact of *Jeevan Vidya* at SIDH was that there was an overly intellectual fascination with philosophical theory and rhetoric. In focusing on *understanding reality as it is*, I perceived a tendency to equate ‘understanding’ with logically comprehending the detailed Hindi terminology and systematized logical framework used for communicating *Jeevan Vidya*, hence reinforcing the pre-existing discursive focus of the organization.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, ‘reality as it is’ could also be read as an acquiescence to prevailing norms. In this context, SIDH staff and teachers often appeared unable to see convergences between education for ‘understanding’, ‘development’ of villages, and the compulsions and conflicts they were facing in their everyday lives. At the same time, given SIDH’s origins and the backgrounds and commitments of much of its staff, the shift away from local community engagement to focus on ‘outsiders’ (largely urban individuals and groups

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<sup>77</sup> For instance, on one occasion a SIDH staff member told me that the more educated one was, the easier it was to ‘understand’ *Jeevan Vidya*. When I mentioned this to Anuradha Joshi, she said that there was clearly a prevailing misconception of the ‘easy’ and ‘difficult’ aspects of JV, and a conflation of logical comprehension and ‘understanding’.

attending *Jeevan Vidya* workshops and related programs for teachers and youth) through campus-based programs also created a vacuum of meaning and purpose for many. Hence a senior SIDH staff member stated in an organizational meeting that “*Jeevan Vidya* has provided us with an understanding of the value of education but we also need a grounding in relationships with our surroundings”. Pawan Gupta also began to publically suggest that through *Jeevan Vidya*, and its initial focus on self-awareness and transformation, as well as an emphasis on family relationships, the organization’s members (himself included) had become increasingly depoliticized and disconnected from SIDH’s original constituency and mission.

By 2007, dissatisfactions were pervasive within SIDH, yet the focus in *Jeevan Vidya* discourse on solutions, ‘human commonality’ and dialogue also seemed to translate into limited spaces for articulating these issues and the experiences behind them—particularly if they indicated differences and perceived injustices in terms of class, gender, and position and remuneration in the organization. Pawan Gupta’s increasingly disappointed assessment of his experiences with *Jeevan Vidya* therefore seemed to reflect potential slippages between an acceptance of human universalism and a notion of ‘reality’ based on ‘what is permanent and unchanging’, and acquiescence of prevailing norms—especially when these philosophical ideals do not get concretized as lived practices.

Dissatisfaction and re-thinking within the organization eventually became the basis for an intense process of ‘re-envisioning SIDH’ in 2007 and 2008. This included a series of internal dialogues and meetings, as well as external assessments and reviews. There were also practical initiatives to re-orient SIDH on the part of a handful of new staff and volunteers from urban, middle and upper class backgrounds, drawn to SIDH because of its role as a *Jeevan Vidya*-center. In 2006, Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi expressed to me their hope that these young

individuals would ‘take over’ the leadership of the organization, yet these new arrivals were cautious in accepting such roles. While taking on administrative responsibilities within the organization, they felt that the existing, local SIDH senior staff were more suited for managerial leadership. Some were also openly skeptical of discursive critiques of modernity and development, the fraught project of instituting (alternative) development in villages through schools, and the considerable managerial work involved in running a non-profit organization. Instead, they showed inclinations to focus on sustainable changes in the micro-practices of everyday life through experiments in simple community and ecological-living on the new SIDH campus in Kempty, and advocacy through short, intensive workshops. These were concerned with providing an example of what a different vision of ‘human development’ can mean, as ways of living and being. One such staff member even proposed at a SIDH staff meeting that the name be changed from ‘Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalaya’ to ‘Society for the Integral Development of Humanity’. However, for various reasons which I indicate throughout my discussion of the dominant terms of contention at SIDH, these efforts did not receive the support of SIDH’s leadership or, generally, of SIDH’s existing local staff.

For SIDH’s leadership, the constraining power of modernity remained the key focus in making sense of the seeming lack of ‘critical impact’ of *Jeevan Vidya* in SIDH as well as among many who had attended workshops:

What is the reality of today? We know that facilities do not equal happiness, but due to a lack of understanding, we are unable to act; this is being stuck in a system of modernity, not of our own making. From JV we have gained insights into how we act on assumptions and the disharmonious effects of this, yet this seems to us like a kind of reality (with no basis): this is “modernity”.

The problem is that most of us approach JV through modern assumptions, hence we either reject the proposals, put them into different slots, or blindly accept them, rather than truly examining them. These assumptions are like a shield that doesn’t allow us to really examine... We need to crack this, to create a space; it needs to happen together with introducing the proposals.

Here, these comments by Pawan Gupta credit *Jeevan Vidya* with highlighting the role of assumptions in determining action, yet draw on a Gandhian legacy to equate such assumptions with ‘modernity’. Hence part of the frustration that Pawan Gupta came to experience in relation to *Jeevan Vidya*, at least in how it was approached by most, was that modern assumptions frame receptions of this ‘alternative’ as well, as modernity was an all-encompassing force, an ontological “shield” that needs to be broken through in order to “create a space”. From this perspective, *Jeevan Vidya* presents an alternative world view, but we are not able to truly see or realize this alternative as we view the proposals through our normative lenses. The perceived lack of correlation between theory and practice—or the promises and outcomes of the introduction of *Jeevan Vidya* in SIDH—is therefore attributed to a *constraining epistemic space*, hence the need for an external space from which to correctly view and understand the proposals of *Jeevan Vidya*.

### *Revival*

In deliberating on how to create this critical epistemic space—an alternative to the confining one of modernity—Pawan Gupta stressed a cultural revivalist discourse:

There is a sense of dissatisfaction; we critique modernity and how modern systems alienate, yet attempts to create a sense of meaning and identity are never quite complete and satisfying. People see and feel the contradictions of modernity acutely. There is a decline in the quality of life, and it’s clear that development in the sense of material prosperity does not equal strengthening social relationships and feelings of connection. There is widespread dehumanization. This leads to the questions of ‘what is human society?’ If we are not able to draw on *cultural strengths* to deal with this, then what?<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> These comments made by Pawan Gupta are from a meeting organized by him to discuss how to take Dharampal’s work forward, held at Sarah, Himachal Pradesh, in April 2008. Apart from myself and a few others, the attendees were largely academics, journalists and activists who had known and worked with Dharampal.

Increasingly, in Pawan Gupta's discourse there was an emphasis on not just the closures of modernity, as an all-encompassing system and represented by development, but the search for solutions in a largely discursive and bounded notion of 'culture'. At times, Pawan Gupta identified 'cultural strengths' in terms of the 'basic faith of the *aam aadmi*' (common man); yet such populist terminology easily permits—and sometimes resulted in—slippages from 'humanity' to 'Indian' and specifically the valorized positions of rural, traditional etc. In this discourse, the 'basic faith' that characterizes *bharatiya svabhaav* (Indian nature) particularizes this 'common man', who is contrasted with the westernized educated person whom is burdened with "two hundred years of assumptions to debunk". Hence the argument for the need for the latter to deconstruct in order to restore a sense of self-confidence and 'control' that has been eroded through modernity. At times, this rhetoric slipped further towards Hindu right-wing political ideology: from 'the need for historical interpretation independent of Western influence', to recognizing 'The extreme destructiveness of late colonialism', to identifying that the 'task is to restore the old order.' On such occasions, Pawan Gupta painted an extreme opposition between 'European civilization' and 'Indian rules/order', and reproduced Dharampal's conflict-driven view of politics which focused on the necessity of conflict, even chaos, for a cultural rebirth.

SIDH staff had been receptive to critical ideas and philosophies introduced to them by Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi, including Dharampal's theories and research when initially brought to their attention in the late 1990's. Yet they were not generally 'on-board' with Pawan Gupta's return to revivalist discourse in 2007. This could partially be attributed to the fact that many had seen value in *Jeevan Vidya*, and that a general atmosphere of dissatisfaction enabled questioning this apparent philosophical 'flip-flop'. Aspects of this discourse had of course long

been a part of SIDH's 'core values', and SIDH staff generally continued to stand by these. Yet despite a lack of enthusiasm, members of SIDH were, in varying ways, also compelled to take a stand in relation to it—particularly, as I elaborate subsequently, in relation to English-medium schooling.

Occasionally, SIDH staff questioned the impact of cultural revivalist discourse in the context of SIDH's pedagogical projects. While there was a general indifference to the re-introduction of revivalist discourse at SIDH, one male teacher in SIDH's middle school in Kempty had worked closely with Pawan Gupta to design his history curriculum, and thus taught his students a nationalist, anti-Western reading of Indian history. In critically reflecting on the impacts of this anti-western discourse on school children at a staff meeting, Jitendra, the school's principal and a senior SIDH staff member, recounted the case of one student: 'he had confided in his diary that he had become very angry from this (history teacher's) anti-Western discourse and portrayal of colonialism, and had shared that when he saw a white (French) volunteer at SIDH, he felt like hitting him, and had not made a card for Ella Rae (the four year old daughter of a volunteer from England) when she was leaving Kempty'. In recounting this example, and the violent feelings against the perceived 'other' that this boy had experienced, Jitendra instead argued for more inclusive and relational readings of history, and stressed the need to communicate to students that 'people are people' rather than 'producing this kind of negative judgment about people from the West'.

For Pawan Gupta, however, facing the "dominant tide" seemed to eventually necessitate a hardened, revivalist version of Gandhi's critique of colonial modernity. Such essentialized and exclusionary discourse reflects Neo-Gandhian interpretations where 'tradition' is reified as an essential, pre-existing condition, rather than as expressing 'culturally-embedded universals'

(Tsing 2004).<sup>79</sup> Notably, it also generated a stronger interest and focus on discursive critique rather than practical intervention in, for example, SIDH's already neglected village schools. For others in the organization, *Jeevan Vidya* was an equally critical lens for questioning the alienating and violent aspects of modern development and its assumptions, yet in its universal humanistic propositions, did not seem to support nation or civilization-centered revivalist discourse and activism. Hence, some SIDH staff did question the deployment of essentialized notions of cultural difference and their use as boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>80</sup>

*Culture, history, politics: theory and practice, slippages and elisions*

In both Gandhian and neo-Gandhian thought, the experience of lack of control by individuals in colonized societies is linked to the mismatch between modern institutional structures and Indian culture. Such critiques in turn necessitate the question of how to build alternative institutions; a question that Gandhi appeared to take on in practice, while it has largely remained a discursive concern among neo-Gandhian scholars. In Gandhi's experiments in alternative institutions for working and living, a key focus was on rigorous practices of self-discipline, of engaging in productive manual labor, and expression of larger relationships through notions of kinship (cf. Skaria 2008, who stresses that the institution/notion of 'ashram'

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<sup>79</sup> While rooted in "Indian tradition", Gandhi's aim was arguably to incorporate human difference into a larger goal of human co-existence. In Skaria's (2008) analysis, Gandhi thus presented a non-liberal humanist vision. See also Nandy (1981) for the broader terms of Gandhi's critique of the West.

<sup>80</sup> The use of 'tradition' and essentialized cultural identities as categories of differentiation and of rule, for example in colonial projects, has been well documented (cf. Mamdani 1996; Mani 1987; Stoler and Cooper 1997). Such scholarship highlights the multiple limitations involved in identifying and fixing 'tradition', and categories such as 'Indianness'. In relation to education and knowledge-creation in India, Sundar (2002) has similarly cautioned that divisions of knowledge into "Western" and "non-Western" elides how all knowledge systems are produced in particular relations of power and knowledge—as slippages between 'indigenous knowledge', 'Hindu knowledge', 'Vedic knowledge' etc. in Hindu-right educational projects indicate.



was central to Gandhi's critique of liberalism). Hence for Gandhi, a key emphasis was on presenting a livable, practical alternative to the institutional forms of Western modernity. Yet as I have shown, in neo-Gandhian analysis there is a greater emphasis on textual study of Gandhi's discourse, and, in some instances, on revival of 'Indian belief systems', or the creation of an alternate epistemic space to modernity. Arguably, this discourse relies on a modern, privatized notion of 'belief' that emphasizes "the priority of belief as a state of mind rather than as constituting activity in the world" (Asad 1993:47). Discursive and internalized conceptualizations of belief and culture, as distinct from embodied, practical knowledge, leave traces of an ontology of modernity.<sup>81</sup>

*Jeevan Vidya* also highlights the degrading effects of modern systems, yet the cause of this is seen as their bases in, and reproduction of, mistaken assumptions about human nature and relationships. Here, the emphasis is on the fact that humans share a desire for value in life, for happiness, freedom—hence *Jeevan Vidya* presents a non-liberal vision of universalism rooted in an ethical theory of human nature.<sup>82</sup> 'Non-liberal' here suggests a meaning of freedom that is

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<sup>81</sup> For example, during the April 2008 meeting called by Pawan Gupta to discuss how to take Dharampal's work forward, several questions were raised about the epistemological roots of Dharampal's vision of history and change by academics who work with Indian knowledge systems. It was suggested that Dharampal himself was firmly grounded in the 'historical consciousness' of modernity (e.g. in his complete reliance on English-language texts of the colonial archives for his research, and use of modern historiographical categories in his analysis), while another academic similarly argued out that 'the separation of politics and knowledge is an element of modernity'. The deep roots of modern liberal thought in social sciences and in critical thinking (cf. Asad 1993; Chakrabarty 2000; Mahmood 2005) is of course a part of what Pawan Gupta was concerned with in his critique of modern education and knowledge systems, yet how to recognize both this pervasiveness (including in one's own thought and life) and creative spaces and practices of negotiation is a continuing challenge for critical struggles.

<sup>82</sup> I personally experienced an epistemic challenge while attending a *Jeevan Vidya* workshop in 2007. My initial critical reaction to the claim of universalism was that these are precisely the claims of Enlightenment philosophies, of liberalism and modernity. Yet these represent a 'particular valence of the universal' (Tsing 2004:1): they rest on particular visions of 'human nature' and manifestations of human 'reason' and distinction, and represent these as universal (cf. Mehta 1997). Hence the particular assumptions embedded in, for example, Amartya Sen's use of the term 'human development' (cf. Da

not centered around the autonomy of the individual but rather expressed through mutually fulfilling relationships, at social, ecological and cosmological levels. Drawing on *Jeevan Vidya*, several SIDH staff members increasingly opined that the appeal of modernity cannot be ascribed to false consciousness; rather it suggests a lack of fulfillment of potential relationships, and is therefore a void that may also be felt in so-called ‘traditional’ social settings. This inability to fulfill relationships is partially attributed to an incorrect assessment of human needs in terms of ‘material facilities’; *Jeevan Vidya* proposes that a reevaluation of human needs that centers the needs of the “I” (the self)—which are fulfillment of fundamental human values like trust, respect etc., and therefore well-defined and continuous—rather than the needs of the body. The latter are also seen as important, but finite and subsequent. The feelings of individual void, social anomy and ecological degradation that characterize modern life are therefore effects of the conflation of the needs of the body and the I. Hence, *Jeevan Vidya* proposes a substantial critique of a central maxim of the discipline of modern economics: that (material) needs are unlimited, resources are limited. While this critique suggests overlapping programs of self-improvement, as well as institutional and social change, my understanding is that many exposed to the philosophy seemed to approach self-examination and evaluation as a goal in and of itself. *Jeevan Vidya* arguably proposes an alternative vision of ethical being (cf. Mahmood 2005) to those universalized as liberalism-capitalism and modernity. Yet in emphasizing alternative practice as an outcome of self-evaluation—especially given that the power of modernity is produced and reproduced as much through material, embodied practices as through systems of

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Costa and McMichael 2007; Morarji 2010). Yet rather than reject such claims to universalism through a lens of particularism, here I had to confront the possibility that I was being presented with an alternate universalism, based on differing visions of the universe, its components and their relationships. Hence, a reminder that “every truth (including our academic endeavors) forms in negotiation, however, messy, with aspirations to the universal” (Tsing 2004:1).

knowledge—it seems to facilitate a focus on self and family, and a deferral to cultural and institutional norms at the societal level.

Arguably, the tensions in SIDH's quest for an alternative *epistemic* space thus highlight questions about what it means to socialize alternative norms (cf. Da Costa 2010a; Gibson-Graham 2006; Mahmood 2005). Through both of SIDH's guiding philosophies, one can trace the limiting effects of constrained notions of culture (cf. Da Costa 2010b). In its neo-Gandhian articulation, cultural values are defined as discrete and rooted in national and often religious identities. *Jeevan Vidya* overrides such parochialism by stressing broader, human values—these may be expressed in culturally-specific terms (such as in 'tradition'), but reflect universal meanings. Yet as I have suggested, the latter also reinforces a notion of culture that is largely discursive. Hence, a conceptualization of culture that is both politically broader and more materially concrete would allow for an understanding that engaging in the world through cultural traditions and human values is not just epistemic, it also involves material practices, ways of life, and embodied conduct.<sup>83</sup> Such notions of culture incorporate broader notions of human value than those bounded by national identities, but also gain meaning through practical and material manifestations.<sup>84</sup>

The focus on epistemic critique, the shared project of 'stepping out of' modernity and the emphasis in *Jeevan Vidya* on human commonality rather than difference also contributed to

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<sup>83</sup> As I elaborate on in discussions of SIDH's Model School, normative indicators of 'culture' such as language and dress were focused on as key arenas of struggle and identity.

<sup>84</sup> For Gandhi, the socialization of alternate moral/ethical politics centered around the work of self-discipline, expression of kinship and embodied practices such as weaving, other crafts and manual work (hence the centrality in Gandhian thought of *ashram* living (Skaria 2008)). While there were some 'nods' towards Gandhian-inspired practices as well as contemporary expressions of such ethical politics rooted in ecological models of sustainable living, they were largely overshadowed by SIDH's leadership's focus on discursive critique of modern knowledge systems.

silences on the role of class in politics of cultural definition within SIDH. In fact, SIDH's leadership could be located in a long history of middle-class cultural and political activism on behalf of rural populations—such as *bhadralok* activism in West Bengal during the nationalist movement, where “The need to define rather than decolonize ‘rural’ character and soul reveals an attempt at decolonization abstracted from the lives of its subjects” (Da Costa 2010a:51). As I have shown, questions of appropriate cultural identities and material facilities were central to SIDH's critique of modern institutions and systems. Yet in their concrete, lived manifestations, these at times seemed to reflect a naturalization of ingrained class distinctions in Indian society. Hence my reading is that class differences between SIDH's leadership and most of SIDH's staff shaped how certain lifestyle choices—for example the desire to educate one's children in English-medium schools, to have one's own motorized means of transportation or increases in salary—were accepted as a necessity for the former, while scrutinized as signs of incorrect evaluation of needs for the latter.<sup>85</sup> The arrival in SIDH of several new, young staff members from urban upper-class backgrounds, yet making simplified lifestyle choices, seemed to contribute to the shaking up of these class distinctions and their terms of naturalization. A local staff member thus publicly articulated his position: “Advocacy is about how people live in the community, not just telling them what is right”. Increasingly vocalized, such questions about disjuncture between discourse and lived practice, at all levels, further strained interpersonal

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<sup>85</sup>As an ‘insider/outsider’ participant-observer of SIDH's journey, I had noted the apparent role of class position and identity in delineating desired and expected behaviours and aspirations, yet found that these were not publicly discussed. I perceived that this silence around questions of class at SIDH had partially to do with a disavowal of Leftist discourse (though Pawan Gupta came from a family that had been staunch supporters of India's socialist movement, and his own notions of social transformation and impact to me reflected this genealogy) that comes from both a Gandhian-lineage as well as the humanist emphasis on commonality as opposed to difference in *Jeevan Vidya*, but I also attribute it to a kind of patriarchal deference for Pawan Gupta by his team (most of whom had been recruited as young men and women).

relationships, led to an environment of distrust and, some felt, disrespect, which contributed to the disbanding of SIDH by 2009.

### *Conclusions*

Here, I have begun telling SIDH's story as reflecting tensions and overlaps between two powerful philosophical bases for alternative education and development: one drawing on an anti-colonial critique of Western modernity, the other on a universal vision based on what it means to be human. Both reflect long-standing debates around political and cultural modernity in India (cf. Chatterjee 1986), and present emergent possibilities for non-liberal values of human education and development. Pawan Gupta often stressed that a distinguishing strength of SIDH was its grounding in philosophies that critically address the epistemic legacies of modernity, as a counter to a modern emphasis on 'doing' and 'method', particularly in relation to education and development. Yet while philosophical foundations—and their genealogies, coherences and conflicts—are suggestive for thinking about the epistemic bases for alternative institutions, I have also argued that both the content and form of their discursive constructions impinged on potentially transformative practice in this context.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> At the risk of opening a can of worms, I wish to acknowledge that thinking about the relationship between philosophical discourse and practice is not completely straightforward. What does it mean to assess a discourse in relation to its material, lived manifestations? As scholars such as Asad (1993) and Mahmood (2005) suggest, our thinking about discursive traditions are thoroughly bound up with liberal notions and divisions, for example between theory and its material manifestations or about the meanings of human nature and agency. Pawan Gupta's concern with traditional knowledge systems at times highlighted precisely such concerns: for example stressing how questions about 'cause' are not about relationships between 'cause' and an external 'effect', but rather about meaning, 'why' (Asad (1993) shows how the former is key to Christian thought). Similarly, Pawan Gupta questioned an emphasis on 'doing' as distinct from 'understanding'. In Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi's everyday lives, 'practice' primarily manifested in terms of spiritual practices of self-improvement like meditation and chanting, rather than lifestyle experiments or modifications. As Mahmood (2005) points out, in revivalist movements ethical being and the material articulations of modern life are not necessarily seen as contradictory.

Through skillfully delivered and engaging pedagogical presentations, I often saw Pawan Gupta and other senior SIDH staff members push audiences (often teachers or youth) beyond their normative frameworks. This included presenting Indian philosophy/spiritual traditions as viable alternative epistemic frameworks through which to understand ‘reality’ and, ultimately, live with greater harmony and happiness. In questioning foundational visions and methods of modern development, SIDH’s discourse raised concerns not just about exclusions from postcolonial, liberal-democratic projects of development but the very terms of this project; the categories and forms of value that it assumes and produces. As a counter to the subject positions seen as valorised by modernity, SIDH has drawn on philosophical arguments about the need for self-transformation to enable individuals to fulfil sustainable and just relationships rather than individual freedom as a basis for a non-liberal vision of ‘human development’.

Yet I have also indicated how SIDH’s discursive critique often ends up mirroring hegemonic development discourse in that it tends to collapse ‘the variety and complexity of life in particular locations into a single word’ (Cooper and Packard, 1997:18). As scholars have highlighted, such radical development critiques “denounce the presumed homogeneity of the developmentalist imagination” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003:26) yet reproduce structuralist logic as “an abstract development narrative” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003:41). Hence we see in SIDH’s discourse a kind of historical determinism, where a narrative of power largely abstracted from the realities that people face in their everyday lives is charged with framing a kind of ‘false consciousness’ that is at odds with a fundamental Indian world-view. Colonial modernity is reified and given an all-encompassing structure, yet even during the historical era of direct colonial rule, ‘people’s lives were made up of more than the experience of colonialism’ (Stoler and Cooper 1997:18). In recognizing colonial modernities as ‘unfinished

business' (Burton 1999), one can therefore either take this to mean that they are perpetually constraining, or as an indication that they are incomplete and “never fully or finally accomplished” (Burton 1999:1). Each reading casts different roles for history, subjectivity, agency, and culture: the former informs a deterministic discourse where cultural revival is the only way out, while the latter suggests possibilities of creative engagements in and with contemporary realities shaped by historical projects and contingencies. My analysis of SIDH’s discursive negotiations suggests that while recognizing the constraints of a cultural/historical revivalist and deterministic discourse, it is also important to keep in mind that “liberal assumptions about what constitutes human nature and agency are integral to humanist intellectual traditions” (Mahmood 2005:5). Hence as an apparently non-liberal humanist vision, *Jeevan Vidya* is a compelling proposal but also a historical challenge given scanty scaffolds to support its practical manifestations in the current historical conjuncture.

### *'There is No Space': Education and Rural Livelihood as Sites of Contradiction*

People also like what SIDH says, they agree that a life based on agriculture and animal husbandry is the best for our village, but where is the space for this? They would rather stay in the village and do farming, but the reality is that there is no space for this. They need money when production is not dependable. People also see the changes in the society and in the world in a way that they did not before, they want to be a part of the modern world, these changes...(Sukhpal and Jabbar, SIDH village school teachers in Matela)

I understand that farming is very important, but I also want kids to be able to get good jobs. Because of this, I want to be a teacher. (Babita, former SIDH primary and middle-school student, currently studying in class 10 in Kempton inter-college)

No way! I don't do that kind of work, *I go to school*. (Sanjeev, 5-year old son of SIDH maintenance staff, attending SIDH's "Model" primary school, when asked if he was going to help clear fallen rocks off the road below SIDH's campus after a landslide)

### *Introduction*

Early in their work in the region, SIDH's co-founders Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi had been told by mothers in villages that education was alienating their children from the land, while at the same time failing to lead to employment. Responding to this critique, and drawing on Gandhian philosophical traditions that valorize small-scale, decentralized sustenance production as bases of livelihood for rural India, SIDH's aim to provide locally relevant education included creating critical awareness of what it means to be dependent on the market, as well as foster confidence in the multiple values of traditional livelihood practices and village-based lifestyles. Hence SIDH's vision of education was part of an alternative vision of development, in which education was a means to self-fulfillment including meaningful rural livelihood and cultural self-confidence. As I have shown in Chapters One and Two, in Jaunpur as generally in the broader context of contemporary rural India, this means alternatives to urban migration- and employment-centered meanings of work, as well as middle-class consumption-centered identities.



In this section, I elaborate on how SIDH local school teachers and staff both value and question the organization's emphasis on rural sustainability. I show how they evaluate and negotiate this mandate in relation to notions of changing viability and 'space'. References to 'lack of space' to impact local communities suggests both epistemic and material constraints associated with changing conditions of social reproduction in villages in Jaunpur, as well as the discursive and practical forms of SIDH's interventions. For example, in response to our questions about how he saw the impacts of SIDH's schools, one teacher responded rhetorically "Out of the children that finish from SIDH schools, how many want to live in the village?"<sup>87</sup> Another teacher told me, "The teaching job in SIDH is wonderful but when we don't see any impact on our society, then sometimes we get hopeless..." Teachers' reflections on their work and impacts highlight ambiguous feelings, of valuing their relationships and pedagogic engagements with children, of making a critical and necessary intervention, yet of encountering limited space for these discourses, and their inadequacy in addressing the perceived shortcomings of village life: most pressingly, lack of employment, but also the absence of lifestyle facilities desired by educated youth. Hence while recognizing their role as good teachers, they seemed to struggle with broader mandates of social change, especially in relation to impacting attitudes about rural life and work.

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<sup>87</sup> Shobhan Singh Negi, who assisted me with parts of my field work, was present during several of the conversations and interviews I draw on here. Shobhan's presence as a simultaneous insider and outsider to SIDH (as a senior staff member who had recently left the organization on his own accord) hence needs to be recognized; we were able to establish quick and easy rapport, and there was a feeling of shared basic understanding of the context and its particularities. I feel that teachers spoke more honestly and critically than they otherwise might have because Shobhan had chosen to leave SIDH. He was considered a mentor figure for many of these young teachers, had himself worked as a teacher in SIDH village schools earlier and had close contact with its field team. He was generally perceived as having an 'ear to the ground'. Inevitably, Shobhan was also a key 'informer' on SIDH and its work, and I hence bring his insights into this text.

As I have pointed out, the major change that I noticed upon my re-encounter with SIDH in 2006 was a shift away from village schools. By 2007, the relationship between SIDH village school teachers (known as ‘field’ school teachers within the organization) and the parent organization (campus-centered staff and leadership) was even marked by tensions and conflicts. Teachers expressed feelings of being side-lined by increasing focus on external advocacy and campus-centered activities, felt demoralized and had also raised the issue of their low salaries in comparison with campus-based administrative staff. SIDH’s leadership and some of the new staff in turn suggested that village schools could not be significant sites of social change, and spoke of a growing ‘gap between what is being said and what is being done, particularly with regard to SIDH schools and teachers’. Teachers’ emphasis on salaries also led to questions about their place in the organization (as ‘employees’ versus those for whom it was ‘more than a job’), and their ability to critically distinguish between ‘needs’ and ‘compulsions’ framed by social pressures.

Based on my interactions with teachers, I felt that many were indeed struggling with their place in the organization as well as in the village communities of which they were a part. Yet I show here that their grounded negotiations around aspirations and work complicate (and blur the distinct boundaries between) both SIDH’s critique and dominant framings of education, employment and livelihood. Their struggles highlight a sense of constraint and closure that implicates the power of capital to frame terms of viability and possibility, but also indicate how critical discourses and particular projects of practical intervention can reinforce notions of closure rather than possibility. As such, my analysis therefore builds on the understanding that “Livelihoods and identities are constructed in historically formed regions of understanding and

action. The micropolitics of these processes have to be viewed from multiple locations” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003:44).

While in its practical work, SIDH’s focus had moved away from ‘community development’, the organization maintained a commitment to an alternative vision of development which included sustainable, agrarian-based production and ‘need-based’ lifestyles. In this context, however, Shobhan opined that ‘the issues of aspirations and disappointments are not *really* being addressed or looked at’. Shobhan and several teachers therefore linked SIDH’s (i.e. their own) limited impact in the region with an inability to substantively address the issue of alternative employment. As I have shown, the causal connection between education and employment is perhaps the foundational assumption of a modernist framing of education-as-development. Drawing on the critique by Jaunpuri mothers, SIDH assessed that such framings of education contribute to the “dispossession of alternative notions of work, value, and future, further closing off existing possibilities” (Da Costa 2010a:9). Yet despite some recognition of how education alienates youth from rural life *and* the ubiquitous experience that education is not an automatic passport to employment, common perceptions continue to frame the purpose of education in terms of employment.

From varying perspectives, I heard young and old, men and women, ask, ‘if not for employment, what is education for?’ As I illustrated in Chapter Two, a normative answer to this question stresses the moral values of education for self-improvement. For example, the principal of the inter college in Kempty repeatedly told me that ‘it is wrong to think of education as being just for employment’, yet in his narrative he clearly equated educational success with formal employment and failure with farming. Similarly Shobhan shared with me how he had heard a state-level government official say that she was encouraging her child not to think of education

as being for employment. Yet in his mind, for rural people whose traditions and livelihoods are being destroyed (partially through education), education is necessarily for employment, ‘what else would it be for?’ In his reflections, he added that ‘if education is not leading to employment, why does the government continue to promote this sham? Why is the curriculum not being changed? They are playing with the dreams and lives of first generation literates. If government is not responsible for generating jobs, then what is the responsibility of the government? Or if it is just simply to generate new jobs—like lots of new teacher vacancies in Uttarakhand where there are lots of new schools being built—that then cause others to lose their livelihoods?’ Shobhan’s reflections highlight key concerns about the relationships between education, employment and livelihood in this rural context, and more broadly indicates how “Any politics that effectively counters capitalism’s global imperative must confront the shifts in social reproduction that have accompanied and enabled it” (Katz 2001:709, quoted in Hart 2002:819). As I elaborate below, SIDH struggled to provide alternative answers to this question about the value of school education.

#### *Institutional constraints: schools, NGO*

SIDH village schools were partially an organizational inheritance from its initial days as a development service provider, when lack of schools was a key indicator and hence site of intervention. But a commitment to change through schools was also described as a way of acknowledging and respecting community desires and demands; hence a negotiable space that could be used to provide village children with strong foundations in language, literacy and numeracy, *and* cultivate self-sufficient and understanding human beings, self-confident in their

cultural and economic identities.<sup>88</sup> An important organizational policy had been to recruit and train local youth as teachers, and as members of local communities, many SIDH staff continued to stress their commitment to village schools even when the organization's leadership began to question whether they had underestimated the compromises involved. For example, Shobhan opined that:

There *is* a need for good education. People don't have answers to the problems they face—like the fact that education is not leading to jobs—but they need to get there themselves. Not through coercion. The prior generation had a critique that this generation does not... We need to recognize this.

As I show, in this context schools *were* confined institutional spaces for socializing alternative norms. Yet as Shobhan's comment indicates, teachers and staff's contextual experiences and negotiations as educators and development activists, and as members of kinship families and village communities, gave them insights into varied constraints that shape, and at times compromise, outcomes of school-based education.<sup>89</sup>

While SIDH's institutional, long-term focus was on school-based education, they had also made various attempts to provide youth with vocational skills through livelihood training programs. My impression is that they found these efforts to be quite futile; I heard SIDH's leadership speak of vocational training as narrow and pointless *in itself* given hegemonic

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<sup>88</sup> Given this aim of providing strong foundations, initial focus was on working with very young children (pre-primary and primary), and gradually expanded to working with teachers (from SIDH, government agencies as well as elsewhere) and youth, to help them to gain a broader understanding of the purpose of education.

<sup>89</sup> For example, Shobhan shared with me how he had been struck by a comment made by Saroj, a young woman (and former SIDH school student) in Talogi whom we had interviewed. When she and a few other girls were talking about how boys get spoilt from education, they had also said to Shobhan that 'the boys *you* taught have been spoilt, are drinking and behaving badly, this is a matter of shame for you'. They gave an example of a boy whom Shobhan had taught in the early years of SIDH's village schools, 'he was very good; even he has been spoilt'. Shobhan reflected that "There is a sense of responsibility that has not been met, it is not just about teachers going to village and teaching".

aspirations as well as the small scale of local economies.<sup>90</sup> In the *Sanjeevani* program,<sup>91</sup> as well as through other projects, they had provided skill-based training in trades like baking, masonry, carpentry, tailoring, food preservation and processing. Tailoring was the only training course that continued to be offered, and was attended by a group of local female youth during the course of my fieldwork. In 2006, a bakery was being run on the SIDH campus by a couple of male youth from Kemptly who had received training through the organization's program, but they left for other ventures and the bakery fell into disrepair. Perhaps the greatest 'successful' alternative livelihood practices or social enterprises that had been generated through SIDH were those of teaching and running a village school.<sup>92</sup> Overall, vocational training as a narrow, skills-based program was perceived as part of what the organization had done when 'in the NGO mode', as a development service provider. As critical assessments of micro-finance practices also suggest (cf. Elyachar 2005), interventions focused directly on monetary income and commodification of labor, goods and services easily become targets of market-driven agendas and the disciplinary powers of capital. SIDH's leadership was wary of both, and my reading is that they abandoned these programs for these reasons.

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<sup>90</sup> Though it needs to be mentioned that as SIDH's founder, Pawan Gupta, began to question the organization's work, purpose and impact, he increasingly spoke of the necessity of being involved in large-scale efforts for vocational training in India. There was also recognition of the need to support innovative efforts in agriculture and farming, yet in the decision to focus its efforts on education (and given the small-scale of the organization), such efforts were largely limited to project-specific interventions in SIDH's early days.

<sup>91</sup> *Sanjeevani* was a residential programme for rural youth aimed at integrating core academic skills, critical knowledge of self and society and livelihood skills conducted at SIDH from 2000 to 2004. It was considered by SIDH's leadership as SIDH's most successful program, but the organization was unable to sustain it due to the significant resources—financial and human—required to run a full-time residential course.

<sup>92</sup> Ideally, this was seen as a combined livelihood possibility with farming—yet in reality I did not find any SIDH or SIDH associated teachers doing farm work on a regular basis.

SIDH's story hence amplifies the institutional constraints—limitations that are not simply organizational, but politically instituted boundaries on social transformation—of the school as well as the NGO as sites for socializing alternative norms, particularly around labor and livelihood. This has as much to do with systems of knowledge and power which have produced and are reproduced by these institutional forms, as it does with the daily practices and bodily habituations they involve. For example, a young married woman who had attended a SIDH village school in her childhood told me that "...while you study you do less work, but then you get married and have to do more work at your in-laws...it is difficult, hard, work, you are not used to it". Her comment points towards how the daily routine of several years of schooling habituates the body towards a more sedentary life, in contrast to the hard physical labor of mountain agriculture. As Balagopalan (2008) has stressed, such implications indicate "the effects that formal schooling exercises on the self-formation of children, particularly in relation to their continued engagement with manual work" (p. 278).

In this context, a SIDH teacher reflected that it is particularly difficult to promote agrarian production 'when we ourselves are not doing farming'. As I show below, community members often resisted the inclusion of manual work in schools, but this was mirrored within the organization, as many among SIDH's office-based staff shirked manual labor tasks like cleaning campus facilities, especially toilets. Ultimately the 'models' the organizational form of an NGO and schools (and the embodied moral economies represented by the everyday routines and behaviors of SIDH's leadership, staff and teachers) also remained largely mainstream, in which highest economic and cultural capital were accorded to managerial, office-based work. As Da Costa argues in an astute analysis of the material and epistemic terms of rural dispossession in contemporary India, "The dispossession of agrarian livelihoods and meanings is an ongoing

process that has made it more persuasive, rational, and institutionally viable to choose a life beyond the fields” (Da Costa 2010a:10). Hence challenges faced by teachers in schools reflect deeply ingrained notions of value with regard to work and identity, and the ways in which they are experienced in the contemporary as aspirations, constraints and compulsions.



Figure 30: Children lined-up for dismissal before a weekend break at SIDH’s primary school, Matela. The teacher instructed the students to review some studies, and pay attention to hygiene. A boy left the line to help a child and an elder climb up from below.

### *Limited terms of relevance and impact*

A SIDH staff member summed up the contradiction between dominant assumptions about the purpose of education and simultaneous experiences of alienation from farming and its failure to lead to employment by arguing that “there is no *real* relationship between education, livelihood and development”. As I have shown, SIDH’s mission was to counter this “emptiness of education” by addressing the underlying epistemic assumptions, seen as encompassed by modernity, and their colonizing effects on the ‘Indian mind’ and society. Drawing on Gandhi and neo-Gandhian thought, and later also on *Jeevan Vidya*, the articulated aim was therefore to counter such mental colonization by questioning assumptions, and providing quality education



that was perceived as ‘more relevant’ to the Indian worldview and its particular cultural and material manifestations in Jaunpur.<sup>93</sup> In the philosophical theories which SIDH’s discourse drew on, spiritual/mental clarity and material self-sufficiency and prosperity are inseparable manifestations of ‘right’ or ‘harmonious’ living. Yet I found that SIDH’s working premise was that a change in ‘mindset’ would eventually lead to a change in aspirations, choices, and material conditions. From this standpoint, a change in perspective was a precursor to seeing alternative livelihood options as viable and possible. At the same time, teachers’ reflections on their mandate and work highlight that the dividing lines between ideological and material intervention and change are not so distinct in everyday life; nor is the trajectory of ‘impact’ and change. Similarly, by rooting ontology in distinct civilizational terms (Indian vs. modern/Western), this bounded discourse arguably restricted recognition of the multiple terms and meanings that people attach to self-identity, work and place in their attempts to secure productive and meaningful lives and futures. Hence I show that while SIDH’s discourse acutely recognized how the power of development works through hegemonic assumptions, its discursive and practical interventions seemed unable to critically engage the “...daily materialization of regulatory norms” (Da Costa 2010a:27) through which development becomes a ‘normative field of action and belief’ (ibid.). I argue that an abstract discourse that drew on bounded notions of consciousness, subjectivity and social change as well as rural place failed to provide (both

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<sup>93</sup> As discussed earlier, there are significant differences and even tensions between a cultural revivalist discourse which locates solutions in revival of ‘Indian’ civilizational traits, and *Jeevan Vidya*’s emphasis on shared human values as a basis for common understanding and relationships. However, in SIDH’s discourse these two philosophical perspectives tended to blur. Also, *Jeevan Vidya* does not prescribe a program of action or practice, the idea being that it will manifest itself through the actions of individuals as they gain understanding of ‘reality’. Hence it reinforces the notion that a change in ‘mind-set’, or of the assumptions that serve as a basis of behavior and action, is a necessary precondition for social transformation.

epistemic and material) spaces for varied meanings of human action and agency, and “misses a large part of the drama of livelihood struggles, practices and dilemmas” (Bebbington 2000:499) of contemporary rural India—including, for SIDH school teachers—the ‘hard work’ of realizing (alternative) development in everyday life (Klenk 2003), and the “skill and creativity involved in negotiating development” (Mosse 2005:2).

For example, in the course of my research, I found that SIDH’s interventions were often interpreted and evaluated by local staff as well as community members in relation to existing discourses about social realities and change. I repeatedly heard that SIDH was primarily valued by surrounding village communities for providing quality primary education; broader goals of challenging mainstream aspirations were largely absent from popular understandings of the organization and its work. In a moment of exasperation, Shobhan somewhat bitterly reflected that ‘after so many years of work people don’t see the difference between SIDH and *Mussoorie International School*’ (an elite, mainstream private residential school located between Kempty and Mussoorie). And while I often found former SIDH students more articulate than their government-schooled peers, they too tended to evaluate SIDH schooling in normative terms. For example a teenage girl, formerly a SIDH school student and now studying at the Kempty high school, told me that she felt she had learnt good behavior through SIDH schools, and that it had helped shaped her opinion of things, like her desire to work in the region, in education. But the reason she gave for wanting to work in education was that in Jaunpur, education is “backward”, reflecting mainstream developmental thinking. During a review meeting with SIDH teachers where they were asked to reflect on the impact of SIDH’s twenty-years of work in the region, their answers too came in terms of development indicators like increased attention to hygiene

and health; increased attendance of girls in schools etc.<sup>94</sup> Some even felt that SIDH schools may have a ‘contradictory impact’ in relation to desired goals. For instance, during a conversation with teachers at SIDH’s school in Kandikhal village, the perception emerged that SIDH school students often end up as ‘smarter’ versions of mainstream school students, indicating that they have higher expectations, because they are strong in studies, have good skills and are more confident. So while SIDH students have been socialized to talk about farming as a desirable option, Shobhan and a senior SIDH teacher speculated that it may actually be more government school students who end up left in farming, in the villages, as they are often poor in education.<sup>95</sup>

As has long been recognized, mainstream school-education works in varying ways as a site of contradictory socialization (cf. Willis 1982), yet less documented is how participants in ‘alternative education’ projects interpret and negotiate educational encounters (cf. Klenk 2010; Thapan 1991). Just as Klenk (2003) noted how young female students in a Gandhian ashram school sought to be ‘Gandhian on their own terms’, I at times noted how SIDH’s discourse as conveyed in schools was open to varied interpretation and transgression. During an interaction with class five students in SIDH’s school in Kandikhal village, I asked what they wanted to become, “*kya banna chahte hain?*” and also asked them to explain why. One girl responded ‘teacher’ because she wanted to teach children, a boy said ‘doctor’ because he wanted to help sick villagers. One boy said ‘mechanic’, quietly said something which I did not catch, and when

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<sup>94</sup> Teachers’ reflections here also suggest that in thinking concretely about abstract categories such as ‘impact’ and ‘change’, they referenced categories which are not only normative, but also tangible and practical. Klenk (2004) similarly notes how in a reflective exercise rural women in Kumaon (located further east in the hills region of Uttarakhand state) responded not to the abstract category of ‘developed women’ but invoked skills such knitting and sewing, and concerns with income generation and education.

<sup>95</sup> Willis (1982) thus notes how experiences of alternatives can be liberating yet thereby also lead young people to embrace normative choices and futures. Such experiences “may mark and stamp identities with confidence and distinctiveness”, which in turn “may also produce orientations and dispositions which help to produce entrapping decisions...” (Willis 1982:128).

I asked him to repeated himself another boy said ‘he said to make money’. The first boy then denied this, saying that it was ‘to make travel possible for people’. Kamla, a female teacher who was standing in the background asked ‘if you all want to become teachers and doctors, who is going to produce food?’ To this, one of the boys responded under his breath that they would ‘all eat bread...’. Here, this exchange illustrates both how SIDH teachers attempted to insert challenges to the hegemonic visions of successful and desirable futures, and raise questions about what they mean in terms of quotidian realities like the need for food, as well as how children may humorously subvert such attempts at moral regulation by quietly inserting a contrary answer: we will eat bread that we buy from the *bazaar*. Again, this young student’s daring and sharpness is a tribute to the confidence and critical thinking skills that many acquired from SIDH schooling—in contrast their government school peers appeared timid and unconfident—yet also further pushes the question of what young people do with such strengths in a context structured by market-centered values.<sup>96</sup>

Dominant conceptions of development also framed community responses to teachers’ attempts to promote the value of rural livelihoods. For example, the team of three teachers in SIDH’s school in Matela village gave me the following account of their impacts and interactions with the local community:

The impact of the education that we give can be seen, its successes and failures. But sometimes when talking to people, it seems fine to us, but then they say you are talking like old people, these are modern times, we need to get what we can to improve... People in villages talk highly of SIDH, they say you have good relationships with people, you meet interesting different kinds of people... but there are people with understanding and

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<sup>96</sup> While SIDH school teachers were free to follow their own curricula, students take a standardized state-wide board exam in class five, hence at least in this year teaching is based on standard curricula and texts. Teachers often stressed the limitations of ultimately teaching towards a standardized test, and this is one factor which restricted greater pedagogic experimentation in SIDH schools. I was told that the community would not accept SIDH schools if they did not offer state board exams.

people that want money... Some people even feel that *people saying the right things* (ie SIDH teachers) are spoiling opportunities, and try to sideline us... This also happens.

Hence, while these teachers feel that they are ‘saying the right things’—and that the value of their interventions are also perceived by some community members—they mention being challenged by villagers who ‘want money’, modern lives and ‘improvement’. Here, a discourse that ‘seems fine to us’, is recognized as being perceived by others as anachronistic, and anti-development. Other teachers spoke of similar constraints in instituting school-based projects aimed at inculcating positive evaluations and habits of manual work, like involving children in school construction, maintenance work, and vegetable gardening. They felt that by working alongside their students, they were able to provide positive examples, yet also told me how such projects always encountered resistance from parents, who, despite some understanding of SIDH’s broader mandate, argued that they were not sending their children to school to learn manual labor.

#### *Pragmatic negotiations, constrained space and co-existing values*

SIDH teachers often conveyed their sense of the ‘power of development’ (Crush 1995) as an overwhelming project, explaining that everybody is on the ‘development highway’ and stressing the contextual difficulties of encouraging localized, agrarian-based notions of development. In negotiating their positions and roles as SIDH staff, teachers and community members, they at times attempted to address this sense of constraint associated with working against hegemonic desires for ‘easy’ work and leisure, yet did so in different terms than those stressed by the organizational discourse. For example, Shyam, a male teacher in SIDH’s school in Nautha village, told me that: ‘nobody wants to do hard work, everybody wants comfort. You have to put in effort to do your own work... farming... but if you think in depth, then we will find that agriculture makes us prosper; but if jobs go, we are left with nothing. But people don’t

think so deeply. At least with those that fail 10<sup>th</sup>, teachers need to talk about both, jobs and agriculture. We need to find a middle way, *beechn ka rasta*'. Here Shyam reiterates SIDH's argument that most lack the perspective to recognize the *real value* of agriculture, namely its ability to sustain prosperity, because they are operating under a different set of assumptions. He specifies the importance of recognizing and articulating *farming as an option* (rather than the implicit fate of failures), especially with students who are not going to study further than class ten. Yet he also recognizes the value of jobs, and recommends talking about *both* jobs and farming: a middle way. Shyam's pragmatic approach to questions of livelihood for youth reflect negotiations with place-specific social and economic realities, rather than abstract philosophical positions. His emphasis was similarly reflected in other SIDH teachers' and, as I have shown in Chapter Two, village youth's comments about the need for 'more balance' between both evaluations of and involvement in jobs and farming. As one teacher articulated it, "we tell children that they can do any job, but they should do it with *understanding*". They recognized the practical need for both monetary income and subsistence farm production, and desired just social arrangements that could facilitate mixed livelihood strategies—such as living in joint families whose members could correctly evaluate the value of, and equally share, income and grains.

In attempting to work with SIDH's anti-modernity discourse—and its emphasis on alternative development through agrarian livelihoods—through schools, many teachers emphasized the perception that constraints were increasing. In doing so, they situated their comments about SIDH and its work in a historical context, stressing that SIDH had occupied a certain kind of space when it started working in 1989, but that both the organization and conditions in the region had changed since then. For example, Sukhpal and Jabbar—two male

SIDH teachers in their mid-twenties working at the Matela primary school, who had themselves attended SIDH schools, and who left the organization for other employment during the course of my fieldwork (one for a job with a new government ambulance service in the area, and the other to join his family sweet shop business in Kempty)—told me that:

When SIDH started its schools and we were in school, government schools in the area were few and in very bad shape. Teachers didn't come, and if they did, teaching didn't happen. There were very few students, especially girls. So when SIDH started schools they did so to provide basic education like literacy, they used textbooks, basically taught the same material that would be covered in a government school but in a better way. They also did development work, providing facilities, women's organizations, etc. But for the last four to five years they have been doing less development work, and more focused on different kinds of education, on *samajhdaari* (understanding). Yet the condition of villages is not necessarily in the same direction as this work. *Samajh ki shiksha* (education for understanding) is fine, we are doing this, but also need to address *rojgaar*, employment; it is not all, but we need to address it.

Here, Sukhpal and Jabbar articulate their sense of two conflicts: one within SIDH, between its prior 'development-focused' work and a current focus on 'different kinds of education', and another between 'this work' and 'conditions in the village'. Sukhpal and Jabbar articulated these conflicts particularly strongly (perhaps indicating their imminent departure from SIDH), yet based on conversations with SIDH teachers I gauged that they reflected a broader frustration with the organization's anti-development discourse in conjunction with increasing focus on philosophical discourses of self-development, and lack of realistic assessment of 'conditions of the village'. These were primarily defined by dependence on small-scale agriculture, increased cash expenditures along with a shortage of income-generating employment opportunities, and in relation to this, they felt SIDH's insistence on the value of farming was 'unrealistic':

The economic reality is that agriculture is declining, for a variety of reasons. Weather is a central reason, the weather has been unreliable for the last seven to eight years. But also lack of *gobar* (cow dung manure), because there are fewer animals, and there is less jungle to feed animals from... So when people cannot meet their needs from agriculture,

they will go in a different direction. It is not just about *samajhdaari* (right understanding); people need to fill their stomachs, fulfill their needs. The organization is not taking this into account when trying to promote an education for people to stay in the village. In order to meet their needs people have to do other kinds of work, because agriculture is not meeting their needs.

Sukhpal and Jabbar therefore stressed forcefully that SIDH was not recognizing, or correctly evaluating, the material constraints that people face in making ends meet—including environmental constraints like changing weather conditions and lack of manure from farm animals. Hence they feel that people make choices about work not just out of incomplete understanding, or a lack of awareness of the value of farming, but out of a sense of compulsion experienced as real.

People are especially negative when they see the fields drying up in front of them. They see the drying fields and think how will those dependent on farming live, how will they eat.. they are thinking that this is useless, pointless. So they place their expectations on their children, they need to do something... they have done so much work, cleaning and caring for the fields, and then the rain doesn't come, there is a lot of despair. What can SIDH do in this context? There is no faith, no belief in maintaining agriculture when you cannot depend on it. We cannot say to children that you should do farming. If there was a good space for it, it would be a different matter. Especially since we ourselves don't do farming—also out of our own necessity and needs...

People do not see the space that SIDH is talking about. But there is also a matter of habit, of *vikaas ki leher*, the wave of progress, and a combination of weather conditions and assumptions... These have changed. My father was in service, but he left, he did not value *naukri*... He was educated, had done high school. My older brothers also studied but did not do jobs. So if there was a space people wouldn't run for jobs.

Sukhpal and Jabbar's narrative stresses that while people recognize the value of agrarian production in the context of village life, they also feel that in practice, there is 'no space' for this. This constrained 'space' denotes increasing environmental constraints which have reduced returns and made farming 'undependable', as well as the power of aspirations and desires to be 'part of the modern world'. In this context, these teachers feel that there is limited possibility for SIDH to impact change, and question their own continued promotion of farming as a basis for



rural life, especially since they themselves are not making their own living off land-based production. They stress that it is not simply education per se that is leading to the compulsive desire for *naukri* (generally associated with government service, which remains the most desirable form of employment, but increasingly associated with any non-farming, income-generating activity). Sukhpal's father and brothers were educated but did not feel compelled to do jobs—his father even obtained government employment and left. Hence, these teachers stressed changed circumstances as key to a 'lack of space' for people in their communities to engage in agrarian livelihoods even if they continue to value them.

We see the value of what SIDH says because we have been with the organization for so long, but most normal people cannot see this, they don't see the impacts. But there is some change, people don't necessarily see *naukri* as being for the sake of it in itself, but to keep life going. This is also because there are so few jobs these days...the pressures have changed things. If people get other openings they will not necessarily do *naukri*, any kind of work is ok.

These last comments suggest that people have also taken what they see of practical value from SIDH's message: understanding that employment is another form of livelihood rather than a form of self-definition, and have hence also recognized the value of not just government employment but any income-generating work they can come by. Here, a compromised understanding of dignity of labor and meanings of work are perceived as resonating due to pressures that people are experiencing. Shobhan's analysis of changing conditions and how people negotiate their constraints point to similar dynamics. He argued that dominant notions of development, largely promoted by the Indian state since independence, have created certain expectations and aspirations among people; "it is a system of value that promotes the idea that everyone has a right to profit". Shobhan went on to describe how this has worked practically. A key government development initiative after the creation of the new state of Uttarakhand in 2000 was to expand public sector employment opportunities and revise the pay scale for such jobs;

common tactics of populist politics in India. Pay scale revisions increased average teacher salaries from an already high eight thousand rupees a month to fifteen thousand. These are several times more than average incomes from other available employment sources, and Shobhan asked rhetorically “Why would people do farming when they see this kind of disparity? If anything, they will turn towards commercial farming if they have the facilities, like contract farming. Farming for profit, which makes farmers into wage earners”. He stressed that people are now looking for solutions in such forms of “private thinking”.<sup>97</sup>

Here, Shobhan’s comments locates the limited abilities of some SIDH teachers to envision social and economic scenarios in which agrarian production could be reconciled with being ‘part of the modern world’ as a part of broader processes of marketization and rural dispossession. Hence Sukhpal and Jabbar’s narrative—in highlighting lack of choice and control, inevitability, lack of control, and using the language of natural forces such as ‘flow’—arguably reflects the power of a neoliberal discourse about agrarian non-viability, or of a ‘dispossessed meaning of development’ (Da Costa 2010a:17; cf. Morarji 2010). Yet while recognizing such discursive confluence as symptomatic of the power of a market episteme, it does not indicate static positions and allegiances: “...subaltern actors defer neither to community affinity and ethics nor to capital in any inevitable and absolute sense” (Da Costa 2010b: 519).

The co-articulation of seemingly contradictory values and outcomes focuses attention on the varied positions and identities that people draw on in ‘the drama of livelihood struggles’ (Bebbington 2000). For example, in Sukhpal and Jabbar’s narrative, there is a tension between continued insistence on the abstract value of agrarian production and rural lifestyles, and

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<sup>97</sup> Da Costa (2010a) similarly points out how salaries of government school teachers in rural West Bengal indicate normative notions of what work is worth remunerating, as well as the economic inequalities in comparison to the meager earnings of agricultural labourers.

constrained ability to imagine and hence help create concrete, successful manifestations. As I have shown in Chapter Two, my research confirmed this co-existence of terms of evaluation. SIDH's critical discourse *did* resonate with community perceptions, as Sukhpal suggests. People in villages in Jaunpur often articulated broader understandings of development as well as positive evaluations of a rural moral economy and how it has been negatively impacted by modern education. In my own research, I found that people commonly defined 'development' in material as well as moral terms. Hence development meant 'basic facilities, infrastructure, and employment', but also included feelings of well-being, confidence, and support for others. Significantly, focus on self-gain, especially in terms of income, and on comparison with the material conditions of others, were commonly articulated as *binaas* (mal-development) rather than *vikaas* (development). Many also accounted for how moral values were being eroded by modern education, aspirations and lifestyles. Yet at the same time elders desired these for their children, and youth for their future lives. In her research in rural Rajasthan, Gold similarly notes how quickly and easily respondents switch between positive and negative assessments of modern life and technologies, as if "...the critique...is floating in the air, reading to be incorporated by individuals, knitted into an already well-established, half-century-old discourse about the degenerations of modern times" (Gold 2009:379). Gold's assessment points towards how localized interpretations of social change are often entangled in 'long-standing debates over meanings of modernity and tradition' (Lukose 2005) in postcolonial India, but as historical agents who need to 'fill their stomachs' and attempt to make meaningful sense of their lives and contexts, people find reasons to value aspects of *both*.

SIDH's discourse similarly identifies the contradictions in people's articulations, evaluations and experiences, yet arrives at a different conclusion. Pawan Gupta echoed Gold's

experience (and my own) that while people most often begin with a glowing appreciation of the positive social effects of education, with the slightest prodding they equally deftly identify negative implications like alienation from agrarian work and break-down of the village moral economy. Yet from his perspective, the apparent contradictions between ‘belief’ in the value of agrarian production and traditional systems, ‘experiences’ of constraint of modernity *and* continuing desires for education, employment and modern lifestyles are necessarily experienced as confusing and dislocating, thus indicative of ‘mental colonization’. Such contradictions between ‘belief’ and ‘experience’ express deeper contradictions between two different ‘world-views’: an ‘Indian’ one and a Western/modern one. Here, notions of subjectivity are therefore reified in bound notions of culture and place, with distinct moral connotations. I suggest that such a framing, which for example views desires for a life envisioned in hegemonic developmental terms as largely ill-informed, fails to recognize the multiple terms of such desires in struggles for livelihood and meaning. As SIDH’s leadership recognized, aspirations for ‘modern lives’ may not simply reflect a desire for material change and gain but rejections of terms of ‘categorical subordination’ (Ferguson 2006) such as ‘backwardness’.<sup>98</sup> For example, a female class ten student at the Kempty high school told me that ‘we will do farming but we don’t want to be left behind’. Yet her desire for categorical equality is also a desire for equality, often

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<sup>98</sup> Ferguson (2006) thus situates the meaning of ‘categorical subordination’ and its relationship to material inequality: “...the question of likeness forces an unsettling shift from the question of cultural *difference* to the question of material *inequality*...the connection of cultural difference to social inequality is a theme that is insufficiently appreciated in much recent thinking about what is sometimes called global culture. For cultural practices are not just a matter of flow and diffusion or of consumer choices made by individuals. Instead, they index membership in different and unequal social groups, globally as well as locally. In this sense, yearnings for cultural convergence with an imagined global standard (like Mr. Lebona’s wish for a rectangular house) can mark not simply mental colonization or capitulation to cultural imperialism, but an aspiration to overcome categorical subordination” (Ferguson 2006:20).

articulated *in material terms* such as the desire for a modern house, entertainment, leisure-time etc.

For some SIDH teachers and staff, the constrained sense of value associated with agrarian livelihood was seen as indicative of the need for conceptual visions and material support for young people to make a life in villages. Shobhan, for example, urged that it is ‘possible to convey the ultimate incompleteness of the present model of development without telling people what is right or wrong, but by giving a complete picture of this model as well as the possibilities, positive things about rural life. And to encourage young people to consider what it means to have human fulfillment beyond aspirations for employment, yet at the same time not ignore the crucial question of livelihood’. Such reflections also implied that SIDH’s moral critique of hegemonic aspirations failed to ‘fairly’ recognize how desires and conflicts around work, lifestyles and identities involve changing notions of security, contentment, communication and relationship. For example, after talking with young man in Lagwalgaon village who shared that his wife was keen to move from the village to Kempty, Shobhan told me that

This issue of facilities, lifestyle changes, and desires for comforts is a complicated one. It leads to a lot of conflict between generations, especially between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, as the former have certain perceptions about work, obligation, responsibility which they feel that the latter are no longer fulfilling, and the latter have other ideas about what it means for them to be improving their lives—less work certainly features, as well as some comforts, entertainment, things like shops, cinema, restaurants etc. that are generally felt to be lacking in the villages. It is not really fair to say that either side is “wrong”, but that there is a real problem about lack of dialogue and communication, so that it necessarily turns into conflict. If there is a decent alternative income coming in, the mothers-in-law tend to be more accepting.

Here, Shobhan’s analysis again suggests a nuanced view of varying generational and gendered expectations and desires— and draws on insights from *Jeevan Vidya* to highlight breakdown of relationships and lack of dialogue as the main cause of overt conflict. Interestingly, he also points out that ‘traditional’ expectations of mothers-in-law seem to ‘relax’ if there is a

dependable monetary income (hence reducing the dependence on agrarian production, for which the labor of young women is significant). Desires for facilities associated with modern lifestyles are not perceived as ‘wrong’—implying a lack of moral judgment—but Shobhan rather considers it fair to ask how young people can come to feel more secure and content in villages today.<sup>99</sup> Instead of countering an urban migration-centered model with a valorized and bounded notion of rural space and work (mirroring discursive relegations of ‘the local’ as formed in isolation versus in connection to other social formations and localities), Shobhan’s perspectives highlight the varied and relational experiences of people living in villages and semi-rural spaces such as Kempty. In this context, Shobhan also pointed out how SIDH’s discourse had led to a lack of recognition of forms of ‘new rurality’ (Vasavi 2006) in which livelihood tactics were not necessarily ‘traditional’ or agrarian, yet allowed people to maintain relationships to rural space. He cited as an example graduates from SIDH schools who had found innovative ways of maintaining a seasonal livelihood from the tourist trade at Kempty Falls, and argued for the need to recognize such efforts. Instead of reinforcing notions of failure and closure, such a perspective highlights possible creative solutions and arrangements through experiences of contradiction.

### *Conclusions*

The fact that SIDH struggled with issues around livelihood and identity through open discussions and experimentation is indicative of a remarkable self-reflexivity. In stressing livelihood as integral to meaningful, contextual lives for India’s rural populace, and asking

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<sup>99</sup> While Shobhan’s articulation was the most cohesive, and, partially due to his nature and partially because of his position at the time as an ‘outsider’ to SIDH, most self-critical of the organization, this kind of nuance and desire for what they saw as ‘realistic’ reflections on village life, economy and society were not uncommon among other local SIDH staff, particularly its village school teachers.

philosophical questions about the value and purpose of education for human beings, SIDH was marginal in a conceptual and institutional field of education entirely dominated by social imperatives of development through employment, and pedagogic imperatives of relevance and quality through improved methods and facilities. Yet, as I have shown, in practice such critical struggles against normative visions and practices may inadvertently reproduce a politics of closure.

The seemingly limited or contradictory outcomes of SIDH's interventions in relation to livelihood aspirations and choices points to the challenges of working within the institutional framework of school-based education-as-development (framed by the assumption that education is only for employment) and against a model of development that continues to dispossess meanings and possibilities of rural livelihood. But it also highlights particular limits of SIDH's bounded discursive framing within this context. Social discourses do not remain abstract positions separate from social reality, but are rather grounded in particular relations of time and place (cf. Tsing 2004). As a form of social practice, SIDH's oppositional discourse and its application in schools were experienced by the organization's local staff and local communities in relation to broader regimes of education and development, with competing discourses, visions and aspirations. Hence philosophical stakes look more like 'blurred boundaries' (Gupta 1995), and impacts like contradictory outcomes. Yet I have argued that SIDH's leadership's framing of such contradictions as indicative of a 'gap' between two discrete world-views failed to account for how people held education "accountable to the multiple subject positions they occupied, and to the material politics of their lives" (Klenk 2003:109). Teachers and staff did not appear to waver in their positive evaluation of a village-centered moral economy, but rather struggled with the practical obstacles to promoting farming as economically and culturally valuable work, and

the apparent need for pragmatic solutions and compromise that recognized the particular constraints of the contemporary context. Similarly, former SIDH-students appear to make use of what is perceived as being of immediate value from a SIDH school education. While such responses do at times resonate with neo-liberal framings of mountain, sustenance agriculture in terms of non-viability (Bebbington 2000), and of education as a means to create ‘a cheap, literate labor force at the grassroots level’, (Planning Commission Government of India 2009), SIDH’s oppositional position seemed to entail an equally partial view of rural people’s lives and aspirations.



## What is the *Model*?: Englishness or English in SIDH's Model School

In one textbook, Sarojini Naidu is described as 'smart' because she was able to write a poem in English at age five. What message does this send to our children? (Pawan Gupta, in a public presentation June 2007)<sup>100</sup>

The quest for English is not a phenomenon in India; it is an obsession, an epidemic, and often a paranoiac fear. (Malik 2013)

### *Introduction*

When I arrived at SIDH in the fall of 2006, there was much discussion about English language education and the "Model School" that SIDH was planning to open at its *Bodhshala* campus on the outskirts of the semi-rural settlement of Kempty. At the time, this campus housed a Hindi-medium middle school (class six to eight) that absorbed some children from SIDH village primary schools in the valley.<sup>101</sup> English and Sanskrit were taught as second and third languages in this school, and amongst themselves children primarily spoke in Jaunpuri, a local dialect of the regional Garhwali language. SIDH's Model School was to be an English-medium/ 'bi-lingual' school, starting with pre-primary and the first two years of primary school and gradually adding on additional classes. It eventually opened in April 2007. In this section, I examine the debates, negotiations and even conflicts which arose around the conceptualization and actualization of this school, and argue that they reflect negotiations around aspirations and identity within the organization as well as in contemporary Indian society.

The following is an excerpt from my field notes from October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006, when I first heard about the idea of the Model School from Anuradha Joshi, one of the co-founders of SIDH.

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<sup>100</sup> Sarojini Naidu was a prominent female activist in the India nationalist movement.

<sup>101</sup> At this time, the campus was also home to SIDH's administrative office, but a few months later this shifted to a new campus located about 500 meters down a steep hill from the existing campus.

The conversation it records took place during a jeep ride from Mussoorie to Kempty. Early in my field work when I was still living in Mussoorie and commuting to Kempty (August-December 2006), I often got a ride with Pawan Gupta and/or Anuradha Joshi in the SIDH jeep as they reside in Mussoorie. Their driver took the curves fast, and being unaccustomed to the mountain roads I often felt quite queasy by the time we reached Kempty. But these commutes also gave me significant insights into SIDH's leadership's perceptions of the current state of the organization. On this particular occasion, Pawan Gupta was not present, but we were accompanied by Karishma, a young Indian-American volunteer.

Anuradha told me that the idea for this school has primarily come about through the demands of SIDH staff members and other villagers, who have “threatened” to bus their kids to Mussoorie in order to give them an English language education. The demand has therefore come majorly from the community—in fact when SIDH was looking for land initially, they were offered a spot and anything they wanted in Kempty village on the condition that they taught English—since they knew English. But at the time they refused. Anuradha said that it has been kind of rough for Pawan to accept—she said that “he has finally swallowed it, with a lot of bile...”—since in some ways it goes against the very grain of SIDH's philosophy, but he has had to do so. We talked in different ways about how you cannot deny people access to tools of power, Karishma said that you at the same time can make it clear that the point is not to look down on local culture. I said that I feel that the point should be made that English is in fact a language/tool of power, but to ask whether this is the kind of power that people really want/is this who they want to be? Secondly, that seeing English as a tool means that it can be put to many uses. I sense that it will be a real challenge for SIDH to do something meaningful with this project. What is their vision for this project? How does it relate to or build on SIDH's previous work? In what terms do they talk about the need for English education?

The terms on which the Model School was introduced to me—as “going against the very grain of SIDH's philosophy” yet something that Pawan Gupta *had to* ‘swallow, with a lot of bile’, because it is a demand coming from the community, including SIDH's own staff members—indicated to me that challenges lay ahead. Particularly, they pointed towards significant differences between SIDH's guiding principle of providing an alternative to mainstream modern schooling, and the aspirations of a major portion of their own staff as well as villagers in the valley. This was increasingly felt as a tension which had to be negotiated, often

with a sense of compulsion, compromise and disappointment. In the past, SIDH's leadership had quite adamantly insisted on working in the communities in Jaunpur either on their own terms of engagement or on the basis of common understandings of problems and possible solutions. As Pawan Gupta told me, such changes partially reflected the changing life circumstances of its staff; most had joined the organization as young men and women, but as they married and became part of larger kinship families, household responsibilities and at times conflicting demands were increasingly prioritized. As I have already indicated, the altered terms of SIDH's interventions also reflects changing terms of social reproduction in post-liberalization India, and their particular implications for rural, agrarian contexts such as Jaunpur. Negotiations around English-medium schooling reflected how such changes were impacting the lives of SIDH staff, their families and the communities in which they live and work.

In contemporary India, English-medium education and knowledge of English language are seen as essential for social mobility. In this context, the availability of instruction in English is often indicated as the most important criteria of a 'good school' (cf. Sarangapani 2003; SIDH 1999). The intense 'craze' for English-medium education is linked to changes in the Indian political economy, as knowledge of English is commonly perceived to be a key unlocking opportunities created by the free market in the 'new' globalized India (cf. Benei 2005; Faust and Nagar 200; Sarangapani 2003). English is particularly seen as necessary for technical education and jobs, as there are almost no technical textbooks in regional languages (Malik 2013). Generally, there is a perception that 'all technology is in English' (Malik 2013). As students at

the inter-college (high school) in Kempty told me, English is therefore necessary for more desirable, formal private employment, though not always for government employment.<sup>102</sup>

English language is also perceived in both economic and cultural terms as key to inclusion in the middle class, and has even been described as *constitutive* of a new, urban middle-class identity in contemporary India (Fernandes 2006). Hence in an ethnographic study of middle-class formation in Nepal, Liechty (2003) notes how “new epistemological codes—of logic, value and reality—were signaled by use of English words in speech” (p. xiv). Apart from being a means to obtain technical education and private sector jobs, English therefore also operates as a marker of distinction from vernacular elites, and suggests a relationship to the outside world (i.e. the West). Hence, “English is considered a symbol of modernization, a key to expanded functional roles, and an extra arm for success and mobility in culturally and linguistically complex and pluralistic societies...It internationalizes one’s outlook” (Kachru 1990:1). Such distinctions and desires tied to the English language arguably frame a contemporary ‘political economy of aspirations’ in India (Morarji 2010), of imaginaries for desirable futures. In this context, English is the medium of techno-managerial expertise as well as cultural distinction (cf. Srivastava 1998). Almost all government school teachers whom I spoke to in the region were educating their own children in private English-medium schools. Given how closely English language is associated with notions of opportunity and mobility, even SIDH staff members worried that their children’s futures would be compromised without English-medium education.

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<sup>102</sup> In the past, government ‘*service*’ has been the most coveted form of employment, yet increasingly ‘*private*’ is seen as acceptable and even desirable.

Yet at the same time some SIDH staff also reflexively engaged in conversations and discussions about the significance of this perceived ‘need’ for English and the socio-political as well as organizational implications of SIDH’s proposed intervention in this field. As I have shown, SIDH’s leadership was extremely critical of such demands for English and openly opposed to SIDH offering English-medium schooling in Kempty. Yet in their own lifestyle and choices, SIDH’s leadership also implicitly indicated their class-based membership in an elite public sphere in India of which English language is a defining feature. Hence as Benei (2005) has shown through an analysis of debates around the decision to introduce English as a compulsory subject from class one in government schools in the state of Maharashtra in 2000, desires for English-medium education are generally intermingled with anxieties and ambiguities; tensions that draw on deeper historical trajectories and discourses. Hence social discourses around language in India highlight the complex relationship between language and individual as well as collective identity in general, and the English language in particular, as languages are sites of “deep seated attachments and emotions” (Benei 2005:147).

In many regions of India, elites and middle classes embraced English as the language of opportunity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when English became an imperial and global language (Benei 2005). In the context of British colonial rule, Gandhi and some other activists in the nationalist movement therefore centered opposition to education in English in their critique of colonial education in India. Gandhi argued that English language had left the educated class with “a burden which has maimed them mentally for life and made them strangers in their own land” (quoted in Fagg 2002:11); a harsh indication of the psycho-social alienation that he associated with English. Hence, Gandhi had stressed that education in English contributed to the lack of relationships between the home-environment and schools, even leading to conflicts between the

two, creating individuals with ‘segregated intellects’ unable to communicate and relate to their families or the subaltern masses in Indian society. As Gandhi pointed out, this was not merely an effect of the English language in itself, but rather a political-ontological consequence of the exclusion of ‘one’s own’ culture and language from the space of the modern school, leading to its evaluation as inferior and unscientific. Hence, “instead of developing creative individuals, education in English was producing mere imitators” (Fagg 2002:11). For Gandhi, teaching in the ‘mother tongue’, or vernacular languages, was therefore central to a school-based education culturally and politically appropriate for an independent India.

Concerns within SIDH about the organization’s proposed English-medium school were based on the notion that English continues to reproduce a discursive and socio-economic divide in postcolonial India (cf. Srivastava 1998). In this context, the English language was seen as more than just a tool of communication; it continues to play a central role as a means of distinction, differentiation and rule in (post)colonial modernity. In particular, it produces and reproduces the divide between ‘India’ and ‘*Bharat*’ (cf. Gupta 1998); terms sometimes used by SIDH staff to differentiate between ‘westernized’ and ‘indigenous’ identities and aspirations, often with moral connotations. Hence a local senior SIDH team member argued that English cannot be taught as just a language when socially, it is a reality that “English is a package, no one thinks of it as just a language”. At SIDH, this “package” that was seen as encapsulating the English language was referred to in Hindi as *angreziat*, or Englishness. It was seen as including all aspects of identity and culture, notions of self-hood and sociality. Hence living under the compulsions of *angreziat* meant aspiring for certain kinds of employment and an urban-middle class lifestyle, wearing westernized/modernized clothing and showing an interest in ‘fashion’, living in a nuclear family, asserting individuality over communal values etc. Schooling, and

English-medium schooling in particular, were therefore seen as playing a part in producing this historical ‘package’ of colonial modernity as well as its contemporary form: a ‘consumer ontology’ (Mazzarella 2003) associated with the aspirational, urban middle class of post-liberalization India. Hence while discussions around the new school were largely about the English language, and how English could be taught, they also included issues such as what the school uniform would look like and include. Pawan Gupta was particularly adamant that it should not include a tie, although he said that this was what he imagined that the community would want. In the end, it included a belt.

*Angreziat* was used to refer to an identity constructed through particular styles and references, as well as behaviours and self-identifications. Hence ‘English’ was perceived as central to a notion of middle class consumption that is “not just about having or possession, but about being and belonging” (Liechty 2003:34). It was also linked more broadly to the emphasis in modern school pedagogy on superficial learning of skills, rather than promoting deeper understanding. Pawan Gupta argued that:

Even in English language education, all focus is on speaking not on understanding. English language classes are a 5000 crore rupee business in India today, yet does it create understanding? Can most people read English literature? We are learning *angreziat*, not English, the sole purpose of which is to earn money.

Here, Pawan Gupta points out that despite the craze for English-medium education and the immense scale of the business of teaching English—represented in the landscape of urban and small-town India by ever-present signs advertising various classes for English—most students

are not even really learning the English language, they are at most learning a ‘packet’ of skills, appearances and behaviors that are seen as necessary to make it in the market economy.<sup>103</sup>

### *English in Kempty*

Kempty is a small road-side settlement locally categorized as a *qasba*, and defined above all by the presence of government services (post-office; departments overseeing phone, electricity, irrigation, police, forestry; high school; bank and primary health care clinic) and a market offering goods and services to locals, people from surrounding villages in the Aglar river valley, and tourists passing through on their way to Kempty Falls, a popular day tourist site from Mussoorie.<sup>104</sup> While *qasba* settlements in the hill regions are much more sparsely populated than similarly classified towns in the plains of north India, Gold’s (Under Contract) description of her research site in Rajasthan resonates with Kempty: “a *qasba* is notably characterized by a *non-rural* consciousness manifest in a preoccupation with trade or business (versus agriculture), and these days with education” (p. 3).

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<sup>103</sup> My experiences and observations confirmed that while there was an almost passionate desire or compulsion articulated around English, students found it difficult to learn, since there are few opportunities for hearing and speaking the language, and it is taught in a very limited manner. A young female teaching assistant in the Model School was enrolled in a BA course in English literature, and while she appeared to be able to read the literary texts prescribed, I did not get the impression that she could speak English. All the students at Kempty government high-school whose exam results were announced at a parent meeting which I attended had failed in English. SIDH staff repeatedly told me that if I or anyone else could convince parents in Kempty that I could teach their children good English, they would be willing to sell their land to pay for such services. High school students did indeed ask me if I could provide English tuitions. I did not do so, but for a period I did help to run an informal, daily English-conversation ‘class’ for a group of women associated with SIDH (a few female teachers, and wives of local staff), conducted upon their request. Facilitating this class was an interesting experience; it gave me a more nuanced view of the many values that people attach to a language (and the experience of learning language, which while challenging is also often thrilling as it opens up a new perspective on the world). I tried to introduce topics of discussion that I felt were outside of the realm of these women’s everyday experiences (for example, during the regional elections, we talked about ‘the meaning of politics’). Inevitably, given linguistic limitations on both sides, we spoke in a mix of Hindi and English.

<sup>104</sup> Mussoorie, located about 15 km from Kempty, is one of north India’s largest ‘hill-stations’, initially established by the British as a recreational retreat from the scorching summers on the north Indian plains. The town continues to be a popular holiday destination for Indian tourists.





Figure 31: View of Kempty.

Both the origins of this settlement and its current form locate Kempty as a space produced through relationships between rural and urban, local and global worlds. I was told that the word “Kempty” comes from the English “camp” and “tea”; the origins of this name and the settlement were thus ascribed to its location as a picnic or rest-spot during the British times. Though it serves different purposes, contemporary Kempty too can be described as a kind of in-between space: a semi-urbanized settlement built along a steep hillside and flanking a main paved road.<sup>105</sup> As a rapidly expanding residential settlement—with new concrete buildings springing up even on steep *mishree*, or unstable gravel, land—there were severe pressures on resources such as water, fuel and sanitation facilities, leading to a slum-like situation.<sup>106</sup> While

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<sup>105</sup> This road links the hill station of Mussoorie to the Hindu pilgrimage site of Yamunotri, the source of the Yamuna River.

<sup>106</sup> In describing changes in Kempty, a SIDH staff member told me that when SIDH started working in the region in 1989, Kempty was primarily a center for government services and a point for villagers from

more prosperous residents have built spacious (by local standards) concrete houses on the outskirts of Kempty, most reside in cramped, dark and, for much of the year, cold and damp rented accommodation. An assortment of plastic and other garbage is dumped down the hillsides. Trade and business—primarily shops, restaurants, transport services and construction contracting—are the major source of income and, certainly for men, a major social preoccupation. Kempty residents also operate businesses in Kempty Falls, a waterfall three kilometers from Kempty and a major attraction for tourists visiting Mussoorie, who come in by the bus-load (particularly during the May-June tourist season).

Children's education is a key motivation cited for families moving to Kempty from surrounding villages.<sup>107</sup> Migration to Kempty from surrounding villages in the Aglar river valley was in turn perceived as having significant impacts on households and social reproduction in the region. I was told that it was increasingly common for children to move to Kempty for schooling from surrounding villages without their families, residing with relatives or in groups under the care of an older child in a rented room. A few children from families residing in Kempty attended private English-medium schools in Mussoorie. For women, a shift to Kempty from a surrounding village meant a lighter workload, but also isolation and dissatisfaction. The shift to Kempty often involved a change from a large extended family village household to a nuclear family residence, resulting in more autonomy for young wives but also less social interactions.

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nearby villages to sell milk and other produce—but there was no *bazaar* and very little population settlement. He told me that gradually people started building rooms and moving to Kempty; 'schools had a lot to do with this'. Both SIDH's *Bodhshala* middle-school and *Guru Ram Rai Public School* started operating in 1998.

<sup>107</sup> At the time of my fieldwork, Kempty had government pre-primary, primary, middle and high schools; a *Shishu Mandir* (Hindu, run by RSS) primary and middle school; a *Guru Ram Rai Public School* (private, English-medium) primary school, and SIDH's *Model School* (English-medium) pre-primary and primary school, and SIDH's *Bodhshala* middle school.

In Kempty, home-centered work was also primarily indoors, compared to the outdoor nature of much work in mountain villages. In a context where cash income is increasingly valorized, women's work in a semi-urban household is also not given the same kind of recognition as their contributions to farm work were in the past, in villages.<sup>108</sup> While students and their families living in Kempty have connections to villages in the region, they are not active participants in everyday village work, routines and relationships. Kempty is often a stop-over before further migration, to Mussoorie, or urban areas such as Dehradun, Vikasnagar, Chandigarh, and even Delhi and beyond. Hence the everyday lives and futures of Kempty's inhabitants are increasingly structured by forms of 'new rurality' (Vasavi 2006) that tie them to non-rural spaces, work and ways of being.

As Vasavi (2006) argues, schooling—and arguably, private English-medium schooling in particular—plays a key (and under-studied) role in mediating such changing terms of social reproduction in rural India. Until the opening of SIDH's model school, the only other English-medium school in the region was *Guru Ram Rai Public School* in Kempty, part of a regional "chain" of schools.<sup>109</sup> This school seemed to epitomize the state of many private "English-medium" schools in the country: higher fees yet low-paid teachers (at the time of my research, approximately Rs. 2000/month compared to Rs. 8000 at the time for a government primary school teacher), often with minimal knowledge of spoken English, instruction in Hindi and texts

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<sup>108</sup> This general sense of women's dissatisfaction was gleaned from various cursory conversations with SIDH staff and women in the Kempty region, as well as from conversations with Megha Sehdev, who was at the time conducting anthropological fieldwork on gendered narratives of pain and healing in this region for a master's degree from McGill University.

<sup>109</sup> Guru Ram Rai Public School, Kempty, is part of Guru Ram Rai Education Mission, an organization founded in 1952 to 'impart high-quality, low-cost education'. Providing English-medium education in small towns and rural areas is today a key focus, and in 2006, the mission ran 125 such schools in North India (<http://www.sgrrmission.org/>).

and exams in English, a lot of emphasis on discipline including corporal punishment, poor quality of facilities, emphasis on high exam results, and a disproportionately large number of boys in comparison to girl students. The children at *Guru Ram Rai* in Kempty wore a grey and white school uniform that included a tie.

*Guru Ram Rai Public School* in Kempty was on the road between the *SIDH Bodhshala* campus, next to which I resided during much of my fieldwork, and Kempty *bazaar*, so I passed it almost daily. I also visited the school on a couple of occasions to talk with the children and to conduct an informal survey with the older children. The school was housed in a small building, with cramped dark rooms for classes, and a small enclosed space behind the school that served as a play yard. The following excerpt from my field notes provides my initial impressions of the school:

The classroom that I sat in had a few charts posted on the walls, such as a “performance chart” with names of students in class 5 and different coloured star stickers indicating level of performance in things like dress, behaviour, studies etc. There was also a timetable, a “birthday chart” with students’ birthdays listed, and a lone birthday card and drawing. Rather than an attempt at decoration, these charts focused on achievement, performance and competition. The birthday chart was interesting as the celebration of birthdays is an urban middle and upper class phenomenon in India, and only a recent one in rural families and homes. The classroom and school in general had a grimy and basic feel to it. A few of the students wore torn uniforms. I felt a strong contrast between a sense of urgency, driven-ness, and performance-focus, and a lack of attention to all other aspects—I think this is the case in a lot of private schools. Their claim to fame is clearly “English”, maybe higher exam results. These children are the go-getters, the small up-and-coming, upwardly mobile petty bourgeoisie of Kempty and surrounding villages—most were from Kempty but not all.

My initial impressions of the school were largely confirmed by interactions with students and their responses to a brief written survey which I conducted with class six to eight students on

the school premises.<sup>110</sup> Through this survey of fifteen students (thirteen boys and two girls), I found that a majority of students lived in Kempty in nuclear-family set-ups, had parents with some education (most mothers class five, and fathers class eight, often ten), and listed occupations for their fathers other than farming (shopkeepers, drivers, contractors etc.). Mothers were mostly listed as doing ‘house work’, one or two also doing sewing and farming. Some had older siblings studying in Mussoorie and beyond—even doing PhDs—as well as employed in government service and private jobs outside of the region. One boy’s brother was working in a call-center in Dehradun. In their written responses to a question about their expectations from English-medium schooling, the children emphasized that they felt it would in various ways help them to cope better in the contemporary world. Hence, they stressed the ubiquity of English: “these days English is used everywhere”, and the potential utility of knowing the language in the future, ‘if we ever go abroad’, or ‘have to speak English in an interview’. It was also linked to general understanding; “our knowledge improves by studying English”, as well as to social compulsions: “If we don’t understand English we will be laughed at”. In reflecting on what they perceived as their parents’ expectations from their schooling, their responses expressed normative notions of social mobility and moral development: their schooling should lead to a ‘good’ job (some even specified, to become a doctor or get a job in the police force), to a life in

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<sup>110</sup> This survey was conducted in December 2006. All my interactions with the students were conducted in Hindi, because even though many of them had studied for several years in this English-medium school, their abilities with spoken English were very limited. See Appendix A for more details on research methods.

which ‘we should do better than our parents’, ‘we should not be ‘left behind’, and should lead to the development of desirable moral behaviors and manners.<sup>111</sup>



Figure 32: *Guru Ram Rai Public School*, Kempty, with “Thought of the Day” posted on the board outside the Principal/Computer Room: “Literacy is the Key to Knowledge”



Figure 332: *Guru Ram Rai Public School* students playing in the yard behind the school on a chilly winter morning

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<sup>111</sup> These responses echo the general findings of a large study conducted by SIDH in the late 1990’s on regional expectations and hopes from school-based education: that it should lead to employment and the moral development of their children (SIDH 1999).

As the responses to my survey of *Guru Ram Rai* students suggest, the lives of residents of Kempty are not merely locally-defined, but necessarily involve multiple and changing relationships to physical and cultural space (cf. Massey 1994). Their aspirations and lives were already significantly structured by external circuits of knowledge and exchange. Given the ubiquitous experience of English-medium schooling as an imperative—which the students’ survey responses clearly reflect—private schools such as *Guru Ram Rai* offered an appealing commodity: an alternative to the perceived poor quality of government schooling with an emphasis on high test scores, discipline and English.

SIDH’s Model School was therefore proposed and debated in a context where on the one hand, the social reality was that parents and children in and around Kempty (including SIDH staff, many of whom had enrolled their young children in *Guru Ram Rai*) found English-medium schooling increasingly compelling despite the poor pedagogical quality of the existing school, while at the same time, *any kind* of English-medium schooling would necessarily be located in a wider cultural politics of commoditized education and urbanized lifestyles. Hence the resonance of the desires of Jitendra Sharma<sup>112</sup> and some others in SIDH’s team to offer an alternative vision

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<sup>112</sup> The Model School project was headed by Jitendra Sharma. He was a teacher in and principal of the existing *Bodhshala* middle-school, and one of SIDH’s three local ‘core-team’ members who had been with the organization since they were in their late teens, and were now in their mid to late 30’s. Jitendra is originally from Mussoorie, but had built a house on a small plot adjacent to the SIDH campus in Kempty, where he lived with his parents, his wife and two young sons, and his brother. His wife joined the Model School as a teacher, and both his sons as students. Before joining SIDH, Jitendra had taught at the Landour Language School in Mussoorie, a famous Christian Hindi-language teaching institution, primarily teaching foreigners Hindi. Hence he was fluent in English. At SIDH, he had been involved in various projects but at the time of my research, served as principal of as well as taught in SIDH’s Kempty *Bodhshala* middle-school (Hindi-medium). Jitendra had long been a ‘favourite’ of Pawan Gupta’s, and they had worked closely together in the past. He had also been strongly impacted both by *Vipassana* meditation and *Jeevan Vidya* philosophy, which had been introduced at SIDH through Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi. However, contentions around the Model School created a significant rift between Pawan Gupta and Jitendra, who felt increasingly isolated within the organization. Jitendra, along with other senior staff, left the organization in 2008 to pursue higher studies and subsequently (along with most of

of contemporary education for their own children and those in the community, *and* Pawan Gupta's reservations about SIDH's role in what was necessarily a fraught project.<sup>113</sup> The former appeared to express a more pragmatic and concrete position: Jitendra and other teachers and staff felt that they had a role to play in this context, and it was to provide 'quality education' and gentle guidance to the community, while living alongside their peers and families and providing a good social example to the best of their capacities. Hence while they recognized constraints and concerns, they did not see ideological compromise as a reason to avoid practical engagements through schooling. SIDH's leadership's reservations towards the Model School arguably failed to recognize the implications of changing terms of social reproduction on their staff and the Kempton community in particular, and imperatives such as their "need to contend with the way others see them" (Mosse 2003:333). As I elaborate below, their own lives also involved dilemmas and contradictions but in a different spatial and social habitus; hence their distance from the particularities at stake here may also have contributed to a more abstract oppositional discourse. Yet as many SIDH staff also recognized, Pawan Gupta's critique of SIDH's intervention in a project which he felt contributed to a dominant political economy of aspirations highlighted key concerns for those committed to an organization whose mandate included 'challenging the consumerist paradigm' (SIDH 2007), as well as, I suggest, for those engaged in other critical struggles with development.

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SIDH's senior team) joined Azim Premji Foundation, a large national corporate foundation working to improve the quality of government schooling.

<sup>113</sup> As I have already shown, these varying positions also drew on different philosophical arguments: the former was inspired by the humanistic emphasis in *Jeevan Vidya*, while Pawan Gupta's opposition was based on a (neo)Gandhian psycho-social critique of modernity.





Figure 34: Jitendra Sharma with his youngest son and other students of the Model School.

### *SIDH's model school*

In December 2006, I shifted residence from Mussoorie to Kempty since my research was being conducted in Kempty and nearby villages. I rented two rooms from Jitendra that were attached to his house but with a separate entrance, small kitchenette and bathroom. It was located on top of a hillside on the outskirts of Kempty, just outside the SIDH *Bodhshala* campus, and literally in one corner of a fairly large open dirt ground in which students from SIDH's existing Hindi-medium middle school played cricket, *kabaddi*, badminton and other games. From my kitchen window, I saw this ground being transformed into Kempty's first play-ground, with swings and a climbing station mostly made of fabricated iron, and a concrete tank 'swimming pool' (the swings became extremely popular with children from Kempty, were used at all hours by youth of varying ages, while the 'pool' remained empty and became a breeding ground for mosquitoes in the monsoon). Along the raised steps which flanked the grounds as an amphitheater, English letters and roman numerals were boldly painted. These were the first of several changes that were made to the campus in preparation for the new Model School.

Classrooms were painted in bright colours, new furniture was built by a local carpenter and also painted brightly, and numerous shopping trips to Dehradun were made to purchase supplies such as cushions and toys. Jitendra also traveled to various Indian cities to visit several ‘alternative’ English medium schools, all institutions serving elite populations. He had placed a call for teachers for the new school on the internet as well as in regional newspapers. He felt that along with volunteers (who come primarily from urban India or abroad), some permanent teachers would need to be recruited from ‘outside’ as the community would not accept local teachers at an ‘English-medium’ school. The rationale, style and expense of these preparations were observed with severe apprehension by Pawan Gupta as well as some others within SIDH, who argued that all of Jitendra’s attention was on fulfilling external demands and on showy material ‘facilities’, rather than the content of the school and its place within SIDH’s vision and existing projects.<sup>114</sup> Hence the question: What was the “model” for the Model School? In appearance, it was looking a lot like a textbook image of a ‘good school’.

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<sup>114</sup> The disjuncture that this focus on infrastructure created can be seen in relation to SIDH’s existing village primary schools. A key feature of these schools was their material simplicity. Privately, some SIDH staff members told me that they felt that this had in fact been overdone, that the facilities of most of the schools were not just simple, they were ‘poor’. By 2006, all the primary schools had toilet facilities (though not all the pre-primary schools), but these had been recently added, hence the schools had operated for many years without. A senior SIDH staff member told me that the prior lack of toilets in SIDH village schools had caused him to feel ‘ashamed’ when accompanying visitors to the schools.



Figure 35: Banner in Kempti advertising admissions open for SIDH's English Medium Primary School.

The following field notes document a discussion between Pawan Gupta, Jitendra Sharma and Jagmohan Kathait, a senior local SIDH staff member, at a SIDH staff meeting on February 10th, 2007, a few months before the Model School opened, and highlight concerns raised regarding pedagogical methods, relationship between current SIDH students/schools and the new school, and the background of teachers.

*Pawan:* I see the model school as a potential danger. What has happened in SIDH *balwadis* (preprimary village schools) and has even been documented in a book is within the organization already, yet we are looking elsewhere for models, re-inventing the wheel. There is a lack of coordination and learning from what we have already done.

*Jagmohan:* Are the current *Bodhshala* school and the model school going to operate as two parallel schools? If so the danger is that the English medium school would take a higher position over the upper-primary/Bodhshala school, and create a divide among teachers and students. Kids will see other students speaking English and feel inferior. How will we really treat English not as a package? Are these really *needs* or pressures? For example that teachers should be outsiders; these are pressures from outside. Then we will see impacts in terms of lack of clarity. We seem to be stuck on facilities, structure...

*Jitendra:* I am always thinking of the qualitative aspects, even in my dreams... We're calling the school "English medium" for the outside only, it will actually be a "bi-lingual" school. English introduction will occur slowly. For example in the play-group there will be 90% Hindi focus; in KG simple instructions will be given in English... But I anticipate facing problems from parents. How to not turn the 6-8 classes into a parallel school will be a challenge. Eventually they need to be linked as the same school. Both would be bilingual. Right now the student base for Bodhshala is from our village primary schools, this is a problem... We need to work with those schools, to improve quality. Perhaps we can think of a 3-4 month crash-course for the weaker students entering in class 6 to work towards integrating students coming from different schools. We also will need a program to make teachers bi-lingual, to a greater or lesser extent. I am starting from facilities, we need to have good teaching and learning facilities... Not all the details are worked out, but I am confident...

*Pawan:* I am worried...

*Jagmohan:* it's like the difference between *Sanjeevani* and the *Gap Year College*. Modernity, English... It will end up that kids from village schools won't be able to come, and those who can afford it or have moved to Kempty will come from the start. Higher standards and fees will prevent others from coming.

This conversation locates the contention around SIDH's new school in relation to its lack of "fit" with SIDH's existing practices, philosophy, and relationships with village schools and students. For example, Pawan Gupta mentions that although at least initially the school would be for very young children, it did not seem to have any relationship to SIDH's significant interventions with pre-primary schooling.<sup>115</sup> The model, as suggested by Jitendra's travels, was rather urban, elite alternative schools. Jagmohan raises concerns about the bases for decisions about the school—particularly the decision to hire non-local teachers when having local teachers

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<sup>115</sup> Drawing on her pre-marriage experiences as a Montessori school teacher, Anuradha Joshi had authored a recognized and well-received manual on pre-primary education for village contexts (Joshi 2009), yet as she pointed out, this lack of recognition of SIDH's work in pre-primary education reflected a broader dismissal within the organization, when arguably SIDH's most progressive and practical pedagogic work may have been in this realm. My analysis is that this partially had to do with the fact that pre-primary pedagogy was less central to Pawan Gupta's ideological explorations, and that pre-primary education centers were run by a team of local young women/girls who had a minimal presence in the larger organization.

has been key to SIDH's alternative schooling practice in the region—and questions whether they are based on “needs” or “compulsions”. Similarly, he sees potential for exclusion and marginalization of SIDH's existing village schools and students, both on cultural and economic grounds as they may feel “inferior” and poor in relation to the standards and fees of the new school. Finally Jagmohan makes a comparison between “*Sanjeevani*” and “*Gap Year College*”, the former an externally funded residential course for rural youth run by SIDH from 1998 for about four years, and the latter a similar program that was based at SIDH during the time of my research, but was not externally funded hence drew a small group of self-paying, urban youth from all corners of the country and was hence largely conducted in English. Finally, the problematic issues were summarized in two words: “Modernity, English...” Jintendra attempts to allay these concerns by stressing that there will be less focus on English than they think, as it will in reality be a “bi-lingual” school. Yet he also admits that relationships with existing SIDH village school students and teachers is a concern to address.

As preparations for the new school were underway, neither this discussion nor others which I witnessed or was a part of seemed to arrive at any resolutions or solutions to these concerns and potential problems. In my analysis, this was partially because of abstract discourse (i.e. ‘modernity, English’) that had become shorthand for talking about conflicting visions of the organization, its ‘core values’ and work. As I have suggested, this discourse often closed off both theoretical and practical potentials for working through the varied, and often ambiguous, positions of SIDH staff as well as the community in which they worked. Most immediately, all senior SIDH staff had young children, and they and their families were eager to shift their children to this new school even as they recognized the validity of some of Pawan Gupta's concerns.

At the opening of the *SIDH Model School* in April 2007, Anuradha Joshi gave a brief talk to parents that stressed the benefits of involving children in manual work, and asked parents to think about what kinds of qualities they would like to see in their children, and whether cultivating these was the responsibility of the school or home.<sup>116</sup> She said that “for children, work and relaxation are one, they take pleasure in helping with manual work like making *roti*, sweeping, washing clothes. And doing manual work also benefits the children’s mental development, for example helps the child develop motor skills that are necessary for writing. It also helps them build confidence, and the child feels happy to be involved in a larger system”. She asked the parents to involve their children in work at home and share their experiences of this at the next meeting. In groups, parents were asked to discuss what kinds of qualities they would like to see in their children, and then on chart paper indicate where they expect these to be fulfilled, or whose responsibility it was. These comments and activities at the opening session of the Model School were aimed at getting parents to reflect on the value of manual work and the moral development of the child, as well as the joint responsibilities of the school and home. This was a clear attempt by Anuradha Joshi to reinforce SIDH’s core values and the vision of education that it has informed, and to stress that the Model School would be based on the same premises, to parents who were assumed to have different aspirations in sending their children to an “English-medium” school.

In the following school year (beginning in July 2007), the new school ran three classes, a lower-kindergarten, an upper-kindergarten and a combined class one and two. There was significant demand from families, including those with young children already enrolled in *Guru Ram Rai Public School* who transferred their children en masse to SIDH’s school, causing

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<sup>116</sup> Pawan Gupta was notably absent at the opening of the Model School.

significant conflict between the two. Yet despite extensive advertising in print and online media, Jitendra was unable to recruit suitable teachers from outside the region (the low pay and very basic living conditions were perceived as deterrents for qualified teachers), and hence teachers were drawn primarily from SIDH's existing staff along with a few volunteers. Jitendra himself taught one class, and acted as principal of the new school as well as of the pre-existing *Bodhshala* middle-school. Between the teaching load, administrative responsibilities and commitments to SIDH's other activities, those involved in the new school often appeared over-extended.<sup>117</sup>

Until I left SIDH and Kempty in December 2008, the model school appeared to run fairly 'successfully'. There is no doubt in my mind that the school provided young children with a more stimulating and joyful learning experience than any other school in the valley. Classrooms were airy, bright and colourfully decorated, children had access to a range of learning resources, corporal punishment was not used as a means of disciplining, and there was a serious attempt to engage children with varied learning styles and abilities.

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<sup>117</sup> On numerous occasions, I was asked to contribute both in terms of classroom time and with development of materials, but avoided making any serious commitments due to time constraints as well as a sense of unease with the project.



Figure 36: Children in class 1 at SIDH's English-medium/bi-lingual Model School, Kempty, August 2007

Yet in my mind as well as in others—as I perceived through private as well as public discussions and meetings within the organization—doubts lingered. Was it SIDH's place to be providing this kind of 'liberal' vision of quality education? Such doubts focused largely on SIDH's role in relation to the larger social projects and processes of which English-medium education are a part. What was the organization's position in relation to forms of 'new rurality' that involved depeasantization and dispossession? How could they distinguish between genuine 'needs' and 'pressures'? As those in favour of the school argued, most of the families of the children who attended the Model School were already residing in Kempty or in near-by Kempty Falls—in fact many had previously been enrolled or had older siblings still studying at the *Guru Ram Rai Public School*. All the families also depended on non-agricultural employment for income, in some cases through male outmigration. Hence from one point of view, SIDH's Model School was a response to the changing needs of the community which they served—and responding to such perceived needs was important in a context where SIDH was increasingly seen as marginal in relation to surrounding communities.



However, as the Model School quickly became perceived as the highest ‘status’ primary school in the valley, it spurred desires among young educated families residing in villages around Kempty to shift in order to avail of this new facility. The case of Sundar, a teacher in one of SIDH’s village schools, and his family illustrate the dilemmas involved. Sundar’s family had significant land-holdings in and around the village of Bhediyan, about seven kilometers from Kempty. Sundar, his wife and their four children were living in their family *channi* (pasture/orchard home) near the village, from which Sundar commuted almost daily to the village school where he taught. When the Model School opened, they moved to a rented room in Kempty so that his children could attend the new school. When Jitendra told me about their case, he said that it had been a ‘big adjustment of the children, at first they were not speaking at all, though now they are opening up’. He also told me that given that their family had ‘lots of farming and animals in the village’, the loss of the mother’s contribution to daily work would be a ‘big loss for them’. At the same time, Jitendra also told me about two students who had moved back from Dehradun, the closest large city and capital of Uttarakhand state, to Kempty to attend the Model School. He felt that they provided a negative example in that ‘they tend to be showier and more spoilt than others. They are given money by their parents, and have money on them’. Hence, as Pawan Gupta stressed and Jitendra also recognized, SIDH’s Model School had a potential to contribute directly to the kind of cultural and material displacement of village-based rural life in Jaunpur that SIDH had worked to counter.

A parallel concern which also remained ambiguous was whether SIDH could contribute to the conceptualization of a *different kind* of English-language teaching. For instance, in a presentation at a public conference at SIDH, Jitendra stressed that “There are pressures, like

teaching English and computers.<sup>118</sup> But we are also trying to address the issue of ‘how can English be taught in a right way in India?’ If it cannot be done by those who understand the difference between English and *angreziat*, then by whom?” Motivated by this project, Jitendra initiated efforts towards designing locally appropriate learning materials (for example developing dialogues for children in English which referenced local contexts), by involving parents more directly in the school and hence hoping to foster a deeper understanding of education among them, and even working with a team from SIDH to develop a “manual” for teachers on how they could think of, and teach, English differently in the Indian context. Yet partially because teachers and staff in the school and organization at large were already overstretched, and partially because of continued ambiguities and doubts about the project, these efforts remained half-hearted.

Above all, Pawan Gupta continued to publicly express his discomfort and displeasure with the school. For example, in a public presentation with a significant presence of educators, teachers and policy-makers from around India, he placed his concerns in a larger context:

In our own school in Kempty, people paid Rs. 50 in fees when it was Hindi-medium, now they are willing to pay Rs.200 for English medium. We have switched it to English-medium under pressure... In this school, when a foreign volunteer who doesn't know anything about teaching comes and teaches, villagers are happy. This is happening at SIDH today. This is how the Indian mind has started working... This is a colonized mindset. As long as education is dependent on these assumptions we can't even see this... This is why education is not able to do anything fundamental; it is a tool of colonization. We feel compelled to do all these things and give fifty excuses, but really we are living under compulsions. I am not claiming to have risen above all this. This is

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<sup>118</sup> While at times speaking of these as ‘needs’, Jitendra was also keenly aware of the extent to which they were social compulsions. For example, he told me with exasperation how the parent of a child in the Model School’s nursery class had come in and asked to be shown the school’s computers, reflecting the perception that English education was above all about providing their children with modern technical expertise from the start. Hence all those involved were struggling with this question of where to draw the line between ‘needs’ and ‘pressures’.

why we have called this forum... What should we do? Should we continue to just be servants to these prevailing assumptions? Or can we do something more fundamental in education?

Here, Pawan Gupta's publicly expressed ambiguities and anxieties around the Model School therefore became central to a broader questioning of SIDH's purpose and work in education. But as he indicated in his conference speech, these were also private struggles, and reflected a deep sense of personal unsettling and even crisis for the organization's founder and ideologue. Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi themselves came from Hindi-speaking vernacular elite backgrounds and mostly spoke in Hindi in their home, but while Pawan Gupta's initial schooling had been in a Hindi-medium school, they had both gone through English-medium higher education (Pawan Gupta had an engineering degree from IIT Delhi, a premier technology institute, and Anuradha Joshi had undertaken postgraduate studies in psychology), and were very comfortable in bi-lingual and English-medium social settings. They had schooled their two sons in an elite English-medium school in Mussoorie (the same school that Anuradha Joshi had attended as a child), and while debates about the model school were going on, they were trying to get their youngest son admission into what is arguably the most 'colonial' and westernized undergraduate college in Delhi. When that failed, Pawan Gupta decided to send him to college in the US, which he subsequently managed to do. The contradictions between these standards and actions in their own lives, and the vociferous public critique of *angreziyat* did not go down well with the local SIDH staff whom were being questioned for desiring English schooling for their own children.

While education in general has long been recognized as a means of reproducing assumptions based on dominant social categories of identity and rule, the socio-political and personal negotiations around *English*-medium education in SIDH also reflect particular

postcolonial and contemporary dimensions to such processes. Arguably, the discourse and lives of SIDH's leadership point to the continuing role of an elite English-speaking public sphere in framing terms of social discourse and representation, including 'alternative' sociality and oppositional projects. SIDH team members themselves had a strong desire to improve their English language skills. They would practice speaking whenever an opportunity arose, and often engage in English conversation with volunteers or visitors like myself, as well as English-speaking, urban-educated members of the staff. In fact, several staff told me that English-language was one skill that they wished they could have mastered, and even quietly expressed resentment that Pawan Gupta had discouraged this. Expressions of this kind of patriarchal 'protectionism' reflect a long history of middle-class politics on behalf of rural, marginal populations; as Da Costa (2010a) aptly points out, this is a 'defining rather than decolonizing vision'. In this context, contradictions in SIDH's leadership's own lives increasingly became a point of contention for local staff as they were being chastised for their desire for English-medium schooling for their children. The overlapping ideological, institutional and interpersonal tensions, even crises, which emerged around the Model School therefore exposed naturalizations of class privilege and status that were ultimately incompatible with the organization's mandate of social transformation.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> As tensions increased in the organization, it seemed as if the term *angreziat* was used rather indiscriminately. For example, Pawan Gupta raised objections to the fact that a volunteer from the US had donated yoga mats to the Model School, arguing that this again reflected the influence of *angreziat* (assumingly, his point was that students could do yoga on the floor). In this context, I also heard how the term became a kind of absurd joke in private conversations among SIDH staff—where everything in their lives seemed to reflect this all-powerful *Englishness*.

## Conclusions

Negotiations around SIDH's Model School reflect key concerns of critical struggles—or projects which attempt to counter both the epistemic and material terms of capitalist development—and do not come with easy solutions. Yet my conclusion to this story is that failure to creatively resolve—and perhaps more importantly the failure to preempt—conflicts around SIDH's Model School does represent another instance of a constrained institutional inability to create working “models” of alternatives—or practices through alternatives become a part of existing social realities, become a basis for choices, decisions, and ways of seeing things. As part of SIDH's discursive, epistemological critique of modern education and development, alternatives were convincingly articulated as theoretical positions but in practice they came up against the constraints of contemporary cultural and political realities and were then felt as painful, personal contradictions.

As I have indicated, while many staff at SIDH saw the point in Pawan Gupta's concerns, they also felt that his opposition was overdone. Drawing on *Jeevan Vidya*, they stressed that if SIDH's aim was to promote ‘human values’ through education—rather than ‘Indian’ or ‘local’ culture and values—this did not necessarily involve a contradiction with teaching the English language. An overlapping argument was that school education was not as significant a site of socialization as Pawan Gupta made it out to be. It was pointed out that almost everyone involved in SIDH had themselves been educated in mainstream schools, and that for most, post-schooling experiences had been much more important for critical awareness and inspiration.<sup>120</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>120</sup> At the same time, the core terms of SIDH's oppositional struggle remained, in my view, critical. For example, I could not help but reflect on the significant differences that I observed between rural SIDH school children and a group from an elite English-medium school in Delhi that visited SIDH as part of a study group organized by an external agency. Firstly, there were startling differences in physical size and

in an age of mass-mediated imaginary (Appadurai 1996), there was also the significant impact of electronic media to account for, such as television (almost every household in Kempty and surrounding villages had dish antennas, provided by the government, which beamed thirty plus channels into their homes), films and songs (played with visuals on VCDs), and consumer goods. Scholarship examining relationships between mediation and class formation in contemporary South Asia supports Pawan Gupta's contention that "'prefab' imaginative structures" *do* have power in terms of how young people make their choices, as "...few have the resources, confidence, and cultural authority to construct their own alternative, nonmediated visions of value, modern, and Nepali selves" (Liechty 2003:244). Such commercial culture arguably draws heavily on cultural codes referred to as *angreziat* in SIDH, but they also work through localized references. Hence there are multiple, and often contradictory, impulses working through intersecting systems of mediation (Mazarella 2004).

I argue that SIDH was limited by a discursive foreclosure that prevented substantial engagement with the multiple dimensions and relationships involved in the formation of viable and meaningful cultural identities and aspirations. Arguably, such limitations suggest "the poverty of an urban imagination which systematically has denied the possibility of difference *within* the modern world..." (Tsing 1993:x). As such, they therefore reflect the significant stakes

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appearance: the latter appeared over-fed, many excessively over-weight, and much taller than the SIDH school children of the same age. Slightly more subtle but still vividly noticeable were differences in how they used their bodies to occupy public space: the latter appeared boisterous, rash and even arrogantly loud, in varying ways made claims to the space as 'their own'—to me reflecting how they (unconsciously) were operating on assumptions of privilege. While clearly an anecdotal observation, it made me think about how the form and content of education works along with other social forces to reproduce assumptions of, and easy habitation of, place and power (much as my own schooling in an elite institution in India initiated me into such questions). Was this a model for children of Kempty, and of a harmonious and happy society and world of the future?

involved in particular notions of subjectivity and culture: of ideas about how people come to be under the ‘influence’ of dominant ideas, and the basis of their distinctions (at times pragmatic, other times ideological) between ‘needs’ and ‘compulsions’. Pawan Gupta’s argument seemed to depend on a static, ‘substantialist understanding of culture and locality’ (Mazzarella 2004), and essentialized identities which are ‘impacted’ by external forces such as English-medium education. Without necessarily acquiescing to the blurred boundaries of cultural hybridity, it is significant here to recognize alternative attempts to conceptualize the simultaneous power of dominant cultural projects and their varied workings as lived experiences: for example notions seeing “cultural narrativity” through which people learn who they should *become* as always relational and multi-referential (Somers, referenced in Liechty 2003:24) or notions that allow an analysis of *angreziyat* as a kind of ‘cultural style’ (Ferguson 1999) rather than expressing deeper consciousness. Such perspectives can effectively highlight the ‘close distance’—or ‘the blend of immersion and self-consciousness that any cultural identification involves’ (Mazarella 2003); as well as the varied, at times contradictory, motivations for people’s choices. As such, they can enable recognition that “...subaltern actors defer neither to community affinity and ethics nor to capital in any inevitable and absolute sense” (Da Costa 2010b:519).

Pawan Gupta’s question—can we do something fundamental in education?—therefore needs to address not just ‘*what* is the model’, but ‘what does it look like as a lived alternative and social practice’? Pawan Gupta could not envision the *Model School* in this context, since he argued that the form and socio-historical content of English-medium education in India cannot be separated. From this point of view, the separation of form and content is seen as an ontological myth that helps produce notions of neutrality and de-politicization, of education as a

‘tool’ for social mobility and development which are in turn taken as given.<sup>121</sup> Yet, as I have argued in relation to questions of rural livelihood and identity, in this context too there is need for equal attention to the politics of categorical justice. Desires for English are about material facilities but also reflect fundamental desires for equality: ‘we want to be like you’ (Ferguson 1999). In this case, the meanings that people construct about English-medium schooling are therefore “shaped by cultural histories and ongoing attempts to maintain worth in contexts of disparate power” (Demerath 1999:164). SIDH’s critique questioned the content of the ‘packet’ being offered—as those involved in instituting the Model School asked how it might be altered to shed historical significations and address universal concerns with meaning and value in work and social relationships—yet failed to ground these alternatives in embodied expressions. Hence, implicitly, the model is not simply abstract but conveyed through lived representations. SIDH’s limitations are not simply individual failings, but point rather to a more generalized ‘poverty of imagination’, of political will and ethical creativity to conceptualize and actualize alternatives that are critical of dominant models of development not just for ‘them’, but work to build alternatives that are desirable for all of us.

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<sup>121</sup> cf. Mazzarella (2004) for how this critique applies to media, and Ferguson (1994) on similar de-politicization of development.



### *Conclusion: SIDH as a Critical Struggle*

SIDH's engagements with education and development indicate how the "relationship between modernizing education and colonial education is still being unpacked" (Sundar 2002:375). They thus arguably reflect the ongoing impact of 'imperial formations' that lay scattered like debris in postcolonial physical and emotional landscapes (Stoler 2008), and how they continue to frame critical struggles with development even in the contemporary. Yet as I have illustrated, seeing colonial modernity as 'unfinished business' (Burton 1999) can either entail a recognition of its incompleteness as a project of rule enmeshed with modern capitalism—hence as 'never fully or finally accomplished' (Burton 1999:1)—or it can imply an all-encompassing force of domination. As SIDH's story suggests, this dialectic between hegemony and domination in turn means that situating a critical project in relation to these histories is also fraught with tensions.

On the one hand, attention to the psycho-social implications of modernity on Indian society meant that SIDH's discourse was unusually attentive to the politics of knowledge. SIDH's explicit aim was to challenge assumptions and exclusions of development as expressed through modern education—and in doing so articulated a critical challenge to the 'epistemic privilege' of market calculus (McMichael 2010)—or of economic-centric notions of human value and meaning and their conflation with human worth, and how these work to 'dispossess rural futures' (Da Costa 2010a). Hence rather than expressing natural desires, hegemonic aspirations were located as part of a 'political economy of aspirations' (Morarji 2010) structured by social ideals and relations, and reproduced by modern education. Yet I have suggested that at the same time, a reading of colonial modernity and its contemporary manifestations as an overpowering cultural and material force lead to deployment of essentialized cultural identities,

and notions of subjectivity ruled by false consciousness. While I identify emergent possibilities of self- and social-transformation through experimental pedagogical practices and the *Jeevan Vidya* ‘shift in perspective’, the effect of SIDH’s ‘anti-development’ discourse was arguably a politics of closure.

Hence SIDH’s commitment to questions of epistemology also meant that terms of engagement were largely discursive—terms, which, as critiques of post-development scholarship suggest—failed to account for meanings of development in people’s lives, including those of SIDH’s leadership. For example, I have pointed out how a significant critique of the constructed nature of dominant aspirations co-existed with an everyday acquiescence of middle class norms or a bourgeois vision of social order, reinforced by a general silence on class as a basis of distinction and power. This tension between critical exposition of assumptions and categories, and reproduction of a politics of elision and closure is a reoccurring theme in my analysis of SIDH’s trajectory. I have located these as varied expressions of contradictions between discourse and lived experiences, contributing to a general atmosphere of demoralization in the organization, and raising questions about legitimacy and mandate in the surrounding community.

My analysis of such tensions therefore strengthens the notion that discourses and practices of schooling and development are never just part of organizational, institutional spaces, but are complicated by their imbrications in people's everyday lives; in their positions as teachers, administrative staff, organizational leaders, as well as members of social classes, communities and families. Recognizing that people are a part of multiple relationships is part of what made SIDH's work and interventions meaningful, reflecting a theoretical commitment to the mutual constitution of self, familial and broader social development. For example, SIDH's leadership and staff often categorized SIDH as a 'family' rather than an ‘NGO’, hence their part

in it as 'more than a job'. Yet as I have shown, members of the organization in varying ways also struggled with competing notions of value (and hence, development) in different facets of their lives, often reflecting differences in class and life-cycle positions, but also the institutional forms of the school and the NGO. Hence, for example, conflicts emerged between the material and discursive demands of the 'SIDH family' and those of kinship families, especially over livelihood and education. As Klenk (2003, 2004, 2010) has argued in her insightful analysis of a Gandhian educational institution for young women in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, people occupy various subject positions, and hold their experiences of employment and institutional life, of education and development, responsible to these various subject positions.

I have shown how SIDH's leadership (at least publicly) dealt with feelings of constraint at a discursive level—emphasizing being 'stuck' in the assumptions and systems of modernity—and I suggest that such firm ideological positions reflected a distance between their own lives and the particularities at stake. SIDH teachers and staff, however, were in a different position: they had to work out contradictions in their multiple roles as members of SIDH, of kinship families and village communities. SIDH teachers and staff at times appeared to struggle with the organization's anti-development critique, citing the constraints of a 'lack of space'. I have thus indicated that in contrast to an all-encompassing discursive critique of modernity, teachers were dealing with place-based negotiations over questions of identity and livelihood, and I have examined various dimensions that this took on, particularly in the context of changing terms of rural social reproduction in contemporary India.

These negotiations, I have proposed, are not external to the workings of modern forms of power, but rather highlight the significance of multiple, relational subject positions and experiences as constitutive of historical projects of critical struggle, not as incidental or as

‘problem’. SIDH staff, teachers, as well as some former students seemed to experience development not just as a change in material resources, but “also a point of departure for the formation of new subjectivities, subjectivities which simultaneously seem to open some possibilities and complicate others” (Klenk 2004:76). For example, through ‘relevant’ education in village schools, SIDH teachers worked to challenge the commonsense link between education and employment, yet in doing so also had to work through the ‘reality’ of declining terms of productivity in agriculture, and desires for income and leisure. Teachers also had to negotiate their identity as ‘locals’—which meant that they were not as respected as government school teachers who are from ‘outside’ and have the power of the state behind them; that they were sometimes perceived as foolish for working for relatively low wages when they could have been earning much more, yet also had lived understandings of context as a basis for relationships with children and parents. As I have suggested, these were also personal struggles for SIDH staff, as they negotiated competing commitments to SIDH and kinship families, desire to enhance the cultural capital of their children, dissatisfaction over incomes etc. Hence, I have shown how SIDH school teachers and staff to some extent recognized their changing aspirations (especially as they educated their own children) as well as the organizational sense of stasis, but tended to take more pragmatic and less ideological views than those propounded by Pawan Gupta, reflecting desires for balance and a need for broader terms of recognition.

SIDH’s discursive critique stressed that the problems of development cannot be addressed from within the same paradigm, yet as scholars have argued and my ethnography confirms, in social reality boundaries are less definitions of ‘within’ and ‘outside’, as fixed philosophical positions, but rather delineate the negotiations of a particular moment in time and place. SIDH’s story thus delineates conjunctural contradictions: I have stressed the need to take

seriously the sense of constraint, speaking of development as a ‘tide’, a kind of overwhelming natural force, and ‘lack of space’ that multiple members of the organization spoke about, in various contexts. Hence my broader concerns with what this story tells us about the power of development and the limited ‘space’ in which SIDH sought to intervene. The tensions experienced by members of SIDH as well as the communities of Jaunpur are part of ongoing contradictions and dispossessions of capitalist modernity, but arguably their intensification also reflect the particular dynamics of neoliberal policies of development (cf. Weiss 2004). They thus inform questions about how spaces for critical visions and practices can be carved out—and, equally importantly, sustained—at the interstices of micro specificities of place, of embodied experiences of historical change, and macro-politics of development and transformation (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006). As such, these concerns resonate with social movement histories as well as academic debates around development and modernity that attempt to account for how people seek to counter experiences of alienation and exploitation with philosophical values based on the ‘engaged universality’ (Tsing 2004) of human ethics, and place-specific norms of culture and tradition; and as they seek to improve the material and cultural conditions of their lives, *and* sustain social and ecological integrity. While the outcomes of such struggles in terms of ‘social transformation’ may be unclear and fraught, SIDH’s leadership’s discursive emphasis on ‘being stuck’ seemed to reinforce a sense of closure and hopelessness rather than possibility. Hence, I suggest that one of the core institutional failings of SIDH—and this is perhaps a broader indictment of organizations that try to adhere too closely to philosophy as ontological vantage point rather than ethical practice as “the co-implicated processes of changing the self/thinking/world” (Gibson- Graham 2006:xxviii)—is that it foreclosed spaces for varied experiences to flourish and thrive as visions of the future. This chapter thus makes a critical

intervention in underlining the need to keep ethical integrity and practice uppermost, and for empathetic recognition of the conflicting lived experiences of the people involved. In this context, concluding by stressing SIDH's 'failure' would only reproduce diminished respect for the complexity of historical subjectivity, of our lives in all their dimensions. SIDH's story indicates how there is always "more to critical struggles than a normalization of political imagination" (Da Costa 2010b:518). Despite the decline of SIDH as a critical learning space and organization, terms of 'success' and 'failure' may therefore not account for the ways in which people can learn and grow through experiences of contradiction.

## CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

### EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNITY

Theories stimulate critical awareness of the assumptions of research and writing. What makes this awareness *critical* is self-conscious engagement with local struggles for power and meaning. By “local”, I do not invoke tiny bounded communities, but rather acts of positioning within particular contexts. The scholar’s local, critical awareness is stimulated in interaction with other local commentaries and understanding, with their own forms of critical awareness. Scholarly theory cannot be separated from local dilemmas and propositions which it engages in dialogue. (Tsing 1993:31)

....struggles over what count as knowledge are political ones, not just part of a wider battle, but a conflict over the nature of the battlefield itself. (Stoler and Cooper 1997:13)

This dissertation has examined negotiations over development and social reproduction through the lens of education. I have illustrated how education serves as a pivotal practice and discourse through which modern development is constituted, reproduced and negotiated as an individual experience and social trajectory of improvement and change in contemporary India. Education is embedded in a long-standing modernist vision of being and becoming, but I have also stressed the salience of examining how this vision and the liberal lexicon that it references play out in varying ways, and take on lived meanings in particular contexts. In rural Jaunpur, school education is seen as key to social mobility and individual improvement through employment and educated dispositions. I have used the term ‘education-as-development’ to capture how school education and development are interwoven as projects of postcolonial governance and as sites for the social construction of modernity. Yet through the lens of critical ethnography, I have sought to be attentive to how people—as educators in both government and

alternative schools, parents and community elders, and young women and men—varyingly negotiate *tensions of development* as they manifest in and through school education. These are tensions between the inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics that resonate deeply in global histories of capitalist modernity, yet also find resonance with localized experiences, contestations and struggles over resources and meanings, over terms of change and social reproduction.

Through three overlapping chapters which examine the production, experience, negotiation and struggle of education as a ‘contradictory resource’, I thus contribute to “unmasking the nature of “equivalents” on offer through educational sacrifice” (Willis 1977:126)—or a critical recognition that the liberal visions of ‘education-as-freedom’ (Sen 2000) are inseparable from the tightly bound, often illusory freedoms of capitalist modernity. At the same time, I keep open space for recognizing “contested meanings and bases for claims in ‘development’ and ‘modernity’” (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003:188).

In Chapter One, I highlighted the particular dynamics of schooling-as-development in the context of a rural mountain valley in contemporary north India, as a disciplinary regime that works through micro-practices of discipline and differentiation, as well as governmental discourses, to delineate both material and ontological boundaries of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in relation to class and space. I emphasized that an ethnographic lens on education-as-development recognizes its power as a project of discipline and governmentality, while paying attention to how it is constituted and compromised by experiences of negotiation. Chapter Two examined varied experiences of education as a ‘contradictory resource’, in relation to desires for change through non-manual work and modern lifestyles, and economic and moral values associated with a local agrarian moral economy. As modes of material production and cultural value, both economies are reflected on as a source of potential prosperity as well as alienation and



displacement. I illustrate how such negotiations are mediated by generational and gendered subject positions. Here, experiences of education-as-development are often about negotiating, and at times critiquing, contradiction and failure. Yet as I have shown, such contradictory experiences at times indicate possibilities for praxis, for imagining alternative arrangements. Chapter Three presented an account of an organization which imagined and attempted to institute alternative visions of education and development in Jaunpur. Through their story of struggle, and ultimate decline, I reflect in detail on the ontological and material, political-economic and cultural possibilities and constraints of a ‘critical struggle’ engaging in conjunctural tensions of development in rural India. This detailed chronicle makes a critical intervention in stressing the importance of ethical integrity, as well as the significance of lived engagements in contradictions and tensions of development: Together, these substantive chapters thus delineated the stuff of cultural politics of development, as I encountered them in a particular time and place.

The often contradictory outcomes of education and development in relation to social reproduction have been a long-standing scholarly concern. My particular contribution is to understandings of modern education in post-colonial contexts, and as framed by broader dynamics of development. Thereby, I offer three substantive contributions. Firstly, by focusing on school education as a social discourse framed by the project of development in contemporary rural India, I shed light on how a key dynamic of development in India, and, arguably, globally—namely the valorization of an urban middle class and the material and cultural dispossession of rural people and places—is materially and culturally produced, negotiated and contested. The accomplishment of rural dispossession is part of a larger global narrative of peasant obsolescence and the necessity of industrial agri-business to feed the world (McMichael 2008). To examine how experiences of modern education are necessarily negotiations of

declining rural productivity and cultural identity is thus a way of outlining the particular forms that contradictions between inclusion and exclusion take in a particular time and place (Weiss 2004). Secondly, by situating rural India as a site of contemporary struggles over meanings and values of development and change, I counter notions of ‘out-of-the-way sites’ (Tsing 1993) as historical residues; a notion reproduced in scholarly inclinations to focus on cities as sites of contradiction, change and struggle. Thus, ‘villages *do* matter’ (Mines and Yagzi 2010). Thirdly, by analyzing both the dominant system of education, represented by government schools, and an ‘anti-development’ alternative, represented by SIDH, a non-profit organization working in education and development in Jaunpur, I expand analyses of “how concepts of the “educated person” are produced and mediated between state discourses and local practices” (Levison and Holland 1996:18). I thus provide a rich comparative perspective on education and development as constitutive sites of modernity, of relations of contestation and rule.

Theoretically, this project is an intervention in understandings of tensions of development as they work through material and cultural power as well as negotiation and compromise. I have focused on education as a powerful site of reproduction and struggle in contemporary India, shaped by historical projects and processes of modernity and development, conjunctural dynamics of neo-liberal capitalism, and people’s negotiated experiences of these dynamics in a particular time and place. As I have indicated, school education is not an exclusive site of social reproduction, but resonates in particular ways with other processes such as generation and gender formation, and relationships to rural place, agrarian work and local culture. Yet the power of school education as a project of governance and reproduction needs to be recognized “as long as the burden of selection/sorting/examination is placed on schooling in an unequal society” (Willis 1982:110). At the same time, I have drawn on Willis’ (1977, 1982) key point

that a centering of ‘active human capacity’, together with a methodology of critical ethnography to capture its expressions as ‘cultural production’, shifts the analytic focus. Willis (1982) has suggested that “for a properly dialectical notion of ‘reproduction’, one starting point should be in the cultural milieu, in the everyday span of the material practices, productions and practical consciousness of lives in their historical context” (p. 125). I have thus shown how people in Jaunpur reflect on standards of value and choice, notions of work and identity, associated with both the modern economy and their village communities, thereby suggesting how both represent particular material and moral claims (cf. Wolford 2005), and how notions of ‘development’ are mediated by contextual realities. Hence, I have attempted to present this dissertation in a way that ‘reproduction is not the starting point of analysis’, but rather an uneven outcome of cultural productions, negotiated experiences and struggles around education, development and social reproduction in Jaunpur.

This project is framed through a critical sociology of development that seeks to recognize the epistemological baggage of modernist social science categories, and rework conceptions of institutional and subjective powers of development (and their relationships) through historically and culturally grounded engagements. This is therefore necessarily a reflexive commitment to a politics of knowledge, research and intervention. For example, through the notion of tensions of development, I have worked through a non-binary conceptualization of inclusion and exclusion. Tensions of development thus highlight how the deployment of categories—often in binary terms—are relational processes of delineating and negotiating boundaries and terms of belonging in a particular context, as “the practices that concepts facilitate/entail differ according to historical formations in which they occur” (Asad 1999:185).

My dissertation locates modern education and development as projects of improvement, aimed at the creation of modern developed subjects. Education and development are thus *particular* discourses of material and cultural value; of modern, liberal terms of evaluation of human life, needs and purpose (cf. Mehta 1997). These discourses take on particular material and cultural expressions, as well as resonances with dynamics of power and change, in varied contexts, thus opening up the question of how development subjectivity is produced and reproduced in its dimensions of inequality and domination, as well as potential and possibility. Negotiations of the tensions of development and modernity, and the cultural productions they entail, are experienced through varied terms of material and moral evaluation (cf. Da Costa 2010b; Gold 2009), as well as multiple ways of inhabiting norms (cf. Mahmood 2005). Hence terms like ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’, ‘developed’ and ‘backward’ are not so clear-cut, countering notions—seen in both world-systems approaches and post-development framings—that ‘development’ represents or constructs a coherent vision and set of ideals. My project thus engages with reformulations of ways of thinking about subjectivity, human agency and power that go along with the structural assumptions of modern developmental categories. They suggest that development is a project unevenly accomplished through normalization and negotiation (Li 1999) *and* that people’s choices and reasonings are not always captured by the ‘power/resistance’ dialectic (Da Costa 2010b; Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). As an analysis of social change in process, my project therefore resonates with the temporal and political sense of incompleteness—and hence possibility—that reverberates particularly with Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, but also Marx’s emphasis on the unfinished project of bourgeois culture, and contemporary scholarly emphases on multiple and unfolding modernities. By

examining such general processes from the perspective of a particular location, neither the consolidation nor contestation of hegemonic projects look like ‘iron-cages’.

I have illustrated the salience of critical ethnography as a method that centers people’s experiences and narratives, as expressions of the ‘active human capacity’ (Willis 1982:113) to theorize and act in and on the circumstances of their lives. In the course of my research in Jaunpur, I was often struck by people’s consciousness, self-awareness and articulateness about their ambivalent, contradictory and negotiated encounters with development and modernity. To me, such critical reflections and positionings underscored the analytic relevance of examining “links formed between lived worlds and abstract social projects” (Mazzarella 2003:80), or how abstract values are varyingly concretized in people’s lives. One such value is that of modernity. Development *is* a lived experience; a universal discourse and ‘self-representation of modernity’, but also “disputed, contentious and re-deployed in particular cultural and historical locations” (Gupta 1998:16). My research subjects’ varying engagements with education, development and social reproduction are therefore necessarily about ways of being modern, capturing the ‘meaning and experience of modernity as daily balancing of the demands of changing material and social contexts’ (Liechty 2003:5; cf. Gold 2009). I have thus shown how modernity as expressed through a universal discourse of modernization resonates in people’s experiences of school education in rural Jaunpur, yet this rationale does not capture the material and cultural tensions that people reflected on. Here, such experiences of negotiations and contradictions are clearly not ‘rehearsals’ for a future ‘modern’ or more genuine modernity, but rather particular and uneven experiences of modernity in a particular time and place (Liechty 2003).

This dissertation is the product of a long personal and scholarly engagement with tensions of development; it is in a sense a conclusion on my part but also an invitation for further

interventions in this stream of inquiry and praxis. As part of my graduate coursework, I took a class titled “Sociological theories of development”. A recurring refrain of frustration among many of my peers in this class was that by focusing on theory we were not paying enough attention to ‘real’ problems and solutions of development that exist in the world. Partially because of my interest in the study of how education and development come together as a complex nexus of power and knowledge that takes ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ forms, and partially because my interest in critical social theory had coalesced around development, I found such objections not just naïve but politically problematic. Despite the undoubted genuineness of concerns about the need to ‘find solutions’ rather than ‘just theorizing’, I felt it was important to think about what these representations of ‘reality’ and ‘theory’, and ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ reflect in terms of ideal and material relations infused with power. As Nustad (2001) has suggested:

the call for practical solutions rests on the assumption that the apparatus now in place has the capacity to deliver a solution, and there are important reasons for doubting this premise. Instead, there is an important task ahead of reconstituting poverty within the political domain; namely, examining how poverty is produced, and the relationship between processes that produce wealth and poverty. Writings on development have tended to obscure these processes. (P. 488)

The tendency of social scientists and other ‘experts’ to treat different aspects of life as discrete and separate is a key aspect whereby the complex and very ‘real’ politics of development are elided, and ‘particular representations are glossed as universal’ (Sivarakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). A central concern of a critical sociology of development which I have sought to contribute to here is therefore to make visible the processes whereby relations of power are negotiated, accepted, contested and enforced through moral and material claims, yet as changing social processes rather than sociological ‘facts’.

For me, such a framing rephrased a key critical question that emerged from the “development impasse”: namely, from ‘why’ does development persist both as a social goal and form of aspiration, to ‘how’ development continues to resonate despite the disappointments, disasters, displacements and many forms of disillusionment that it has entailed. How, or through what kinds of practices and imaginings, is the cultural production of development enacted? These are questions about reproduction and the accomplishment of legitimacy and normalization, but also of claims for entitlement and equality. Education-as-development is a powerful discourse and experience, yet as I have shown here by examining the often compromised and negotiated experiences of education in rural Jaunpur, it has ‘effects’ that are not accounted for in the rationale of schooling-as-development nor in accounts of development as reproduction. The analytic and political ‘accounting’ of such effects—not as ‘outcomes’ but social dynamics—is a way to trace but also question processes of normalization. Hence, an “ontology of a politics of possibility, and the theoretical commitment to such an ontology is an ethnical act of enabling such a politics” (Gibson- Graham 2006:xxvii). I thus posit my contribution to an important, ongoing research agenda: “the especial province of a qualitative, ethnographic, commensurate, ‘living’ method—such processes do not leave their Public Records in the Bourgeois Office of Account” (Willis 1982:114).

## APPENDIX A

### NOTES ON FIELD RESEARCH STRATEGIES, METHODS AND EXPERIENCES

The field research which I draw on in this dissertation was conducted between August 2006 and December 2008. During these two years, I was not always engaged singularly in field work. Life intervened: my husband at the time and I separated soon after we arrived in India for my planned year of field-work; my grandmother in Bombay had a stroke and passed away a few months later; I returned to Ithaca for the summer of 2008 for a funded RA'ship and library work, and I became involved in various activities at SIDH, my host organization in Jaunpur. It was undoubtedly one of the most difficult but ultimately also enriching times in my life. Having my individual project of fieldwork as well as the collective support and sense of community I found at SIDH gave me direction. Most of the structured data collection was conducted during my first eight months in the field. It is likely that if I had left Jaunpur in the summer of 2007 as originally planned, I would have had 'sufficient' data to support my dissertation project. The decision to stay on was a personal one; I had found a space that offered not just solace but growth, and was wary of leaving it behind. On hindsight, continuing to reside in my field site undoubtedly enriched my life, fieldwork and this project. Most significantly, I met Vinish Gupta and we started on a life-long relationship; we were married in a simple ceremony with family and friends on the SIDH campus in October of 2008. In terms of this project, reflecting on my data 'on site' meant that I was able to re-visit questions through conversations with those around me—and significant here was that SIDH was at the time focused on similar issues—as well as re-engage with key respondents. I was able to follow unexpected events which unfolded at SIDH in 2007 and 2008; they form the basis of my analysis in Chapter Three. Above all, the



extended experience of daily living in the region—from August to December 2006 in the nearby hill-station of Mussoorie (fifteen kilometers away), between January 2007 and January 2008 in Kempty, and then until the end of 2008 on the newly constructed SIDH campus—meant that I had the luxury of a slow, percolated understanding of a particular time and place.



Figure 37: Author with Chaiti Seth (SIDH staff) and Anuradha Joshi (SIDH co-founder) at her marriage to Vinish Gupta on the SIDH campus, October 2008.

Since SIDH played a key role in the course of my fieldwork, my relationship with the organization necessitates further explicitness. My contact with the region actually goes back to childhood: I spent a memorable year and half in the early 1980s living and going to school in Mussoorie. The landscape and its people left a strong impression. I returned to Mussoorie in 1997 to study Hindi at the Landour Language School, a well-known Hindi language instruction center initially established to teach modern Hindustani to Christian missionaries. During this time, I was, quite by chance, introduced to Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi, the founders of SIDH. Their description of the organization, its mission and work immediately resonated with my own critical interest in questions of development and knowledge. I spent a couple of months volunteering with them, primarily working through their Mussoorie-based office. When I

returned to Mussoorie for two months for further Hindi studies in 1999, I therefore re-connected with the organization and again took on voluntary tasks compatible with my skill-set (qualitative data analysis, compilations, textual analysis). During these relatively brief stints, I made a few visits to Kempty as well as SIDH's village schools, met some of the Kempty-based staff and teachers, and heard and saw enough to feel that there was something of value happening here. I continued to follow and keep in touch with Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi, and indicated to them that I would like to eventually come back for longer. When I joined the MS/PhD program in Development Sociology at Cornell, I was from the start quite clear on the broad questions I wanted to examine and that SIDH would be central to my research. I had gained some understanding of Jaunpur, the region in which SIDH was working, through the SIDH research projects that I had helped collate and write-up, as well as through conversations with SIDH staff. SIDH's experiences indicated that the contradictions of modern school education resonated strongly in people's lives in the region. Being a relatively isolated mountain region that was until recently largely dependent on sustenance agriculture, and where mass education is a recent phenomenon, Jaunpur did therefore seem like a fruitful site to examine critical questions around education and development. My sense was that the questions resonated more broadly in the Indian context and beyond, but that dynamics were particularly starkly outlined here. This sense was reinforced during a brief research trip to the region in 2002. Yet my choice of conducting research in Jaunpur was above all based on the relationship that I had with people at SIDH.

It is difficult to capture the many ways in which my relationship to SIDH shaped my experiences and engagements with dissertation fieldwork in Jaunpur. But perhaps most crucial was that I was able to make use of the assistance of Shobhan Singh Negi, one of SIDH's founding staff members, at the time in his mid 30s and married with two children. When I

started my fieldwork in 2006, Shobhan had recently left the organization to pursue independent work on issues of education, livelihood and local governance. He had received a fellowship to work with regional projects on these issues, but was available to help me as a research assistant for six months. I had met and interacted with Shobhan on previous visits to SIDH, and had appreciated his perceptive insights and acumen. He had significant experience of conducting qualitative research with SIDH, as well as over fifteen years of working in the region. Although Shobhan is not from Jaunpur—his village was in a region of Tehri Garhwal that was submerged by the Tehri Dam, and he was allotted land outside Dehradun—he could communicate in the local Jaunpuri language, and had detailed knowledge of local culture and customs. In many ways Shobhan was more qualified in field research than I was, and for the portion of my research that we worked together, he often served as much as a ‘research guide’ as an assistant. As a novice fieldworker, I felt extremely fortunate to have this tutelage. Shobhan’s commitment to my project was half-time, so we worked together intensely for two weeks every month. During these periods, we sat together (usually on SIDH’s premises) to formulate and translate (into Hindi) questions and strategies, planned field visits and went to villages in the Jaunpur region. We travelled by foot when possible, on Shobhan’s motorcycle, and, occasionally due to weather constraints, by a local hired vehicle. On field visits, Shobhan was instrumental in recommending respondents and setting up interviews and group discussions, introducing me, and often, in getting the conversation going. At times, particularly in discussions with elders which were largely dependent on Jaunpuri, Shobhan asked questions and noted answers. In the initial period of fieldwork, Shobhan often did the bulk of speaking while I interjected questions and noted answers; gradually my spoken interventions increased. We both wrote-up our notes independently (I in a mix of English and Hindi, Shobhan in Hindi), as well as general

observations and conclusions from each field visit, and then discussed these orally. At the end of each two-week period, we would assess strategies to determine what seemed to be working well, and what did not appear feasible or fruitful to continue. My engagement with the process as an academic researcher at times meant that my focus differed somewhat from Shobhan's, whose experiences and interests were more directly related to practical interventions in the field, yet we were able to recognize and work through such differences (though ultimately this was my project, hence I decided the focus of investigation). While working with Shobhan for the first six months of my research was therefore often a highly collaborative effort and engagement, the data that I have chosen to ultimately include in this dissertation reflects the purpose and focus of my particular scholarly endeavor.

Clearly, my position as a friend and associate of SIDH's and of Shobhan's shaped how I perceived people and their contexts, as well as vice-versa, in the course of my research (particularly initially). Through these contacts, I had gained access based on longstanding relationships of trust and respect; hence with many respondents (though not true of more senior government employees such as inter-college lecturers and principals) I did not have to establish my 'credentials'. I also gained invaluable critical insights into key questions of my research; hence my friends at SIDH, and Shobhan in particular, are key 'informants' of this project. Initially, I wondered whether being associated with SIDH meant that people would assume that I was invested in SIDH's critical 'anti-development' discourse, and would therefore provide answers to my questions about impacts of education and socio-economic change in these terms. Yet I found that normative development discourse had much more weight; respondents generally started with entirely positive assessments of modern education and its impacts. Often, they gradually moved from these glowing assessments to critiques of the effects of modernity in

different facets of their lives, of feelings of disappointment and decline, as well as providing varied answers to the question of ‘what is development?’ without any prodding on the researchers’ part. Rather than indicative of a desire to please us, I thus took such critiques to indicate experiences of how “crisis is intrinsic to development” (Watts 1995: 48), as well as expressive of how seemingly contradictory evaluations of gain and loss constitute experiences of modernity in postcolonial India (cf. Gold 2009).

In conducting research among SIDH students, teachers and staff, Shobhan’s presence as a simultaneous insider and outsider to SIDH (as a senior staff member who had recently left the organization of his own accord) hence needs to be recognized. We were able to establish quick and easy rapport, and there was a feeling of shared basic understanding of the context and its particularities. I feel that teachers spoke more honestly and critically than they otherwise might have because Shobhan had chosen to leave SIDH. He was considered a mentor figure for many of these young teachers, had himself worked as a teacher in SIDH village schools earlier and had close contact with its field team. When dissatisfactions were articulated by SIDH teachers, particularly around salary issues, Shobhan was central to initiating critical dialogue on the role of village schools in SIDH. He was generally perceived as having an ‘ear to the ground’. The nature of my relationships also played a part. I feel strongly that my relationships with teachers and staff—rather than just Pawan Gupta and Anuradha Joshi, SIDH’s leadership—made a difference in my research interactions within the organization. In particular, I felt that teachers and staff were often ready to share their critical reflections on the organization, as well as their personal struggles and troubles, and that they appreciated my non-judgmental reception.



Figure 38: Conducting a research exercise with children at SIDH primary school, Kandikhal village.

Working with Shobhan during the initial, and most intensive, part of my fieldwork was generally enriching to me personally and to my research project. However, there were a couple of situations in which I experienced the limitations of being introduced to a research context through someone with previously defined local roles and identity. Generally, gender dynamics are less rigid in the hill regions of north India than in the plains—women are not in *purdah* and hence have a public presence—and I never experienced outright dismissal by male respondents. However, I did at times feel that elderly male respondents tended to focus on Shobhan in interactions. Although we conducted group discussions with young men together, we felt that young women would be more comfortable with me alone, particularly in individual interviews but also in group discussions, and that similarly young men might provide more honest answers if Shobhan interviewed them alone. Shobhan also indicated to me early in my fieldwork that I would likely have better access to certain government officials—particularly in the inter-college (high school) in Kempty—alone than through/with him. He felt that his status as a ‘local’, and his association with SIDH, would not give us much purchase in this context. While he

introduced me to a couple of lecturers on my initial visit to the school, subsequent contact with the principal as well as research engagements were thus conducted by me alone.

As in most multi-lingual contexts, I found research to involve an often fluid (though at times sticky and vague) exercise of switching and translation. I speak, read and write Hindi at an intermediate level; yet I am aware that my Hindi is good enough that I sometimes settle for getting the gist of what is being said, without grasping the nuances or subtleties. At times, I sought clarification, but there were specific utterances that people made that did not make it into my notes or into Shobhan and my discussions, and hence analysis. Shobhan is about as competent in spoken English as I am in Hindi, and more so in written English, and also speaks the regional Garhwali language as well as local Jaunpuri. Shobhan and I conversed, prepared field visits and discussed findings in a mix of Hindi and English. Written research materials such as questionnaires were generally discussed by both of us, formulated in English by me, then translated into Hindi by Shobhan. Some conversations with elders took place in the local Jaunpuri language, which Shobhan speaks and understands. In these conversations, Shobhan would intermittently orally translate into Hindi for me, I interjected questions in Hindi, and jotted notes in a mix of Hindi and English. All of my interactions with children, youth and SIDH staff took place in Hindi. Since Hindi is the medium of instruction in local schools and colleges (even when texts are in English, as they are in English-medium schools and certain college courses, spoken instruction takes place in Hindi), all those who have gone through even basic schooling speak some Hindi. Most of my conversations with government school teachers and officials were similarly conducted in Hindi, with a few notable exceptions. On a few occasions, my initiation of conversation in Hindi was met with replies in English (particularly from government school teachers and officials), and on two occasions (with the Kempton inter-college principal and

a block level education department officer), Shobhan actually advised me to introduce myself in English (and provide my Cornell University card, which I otherwise found little use for in the course of my field work) to prove my ‘credentials’ as well as indicate my recognition of their status and knowledge of English.

To get a sense of the ‘educational field’ in Jaunpur, I spent time in, and conducted exercises with children and interviews with staff, in the four different kinds of schools operating in the valley: government schools; NGO schools (SIDH); a Hindu religious school (Shishu Mandir) and a private English-medium school (Guru Ram Rai Public School). My main focus, however, was on government schools and SIDH schools, hence I conducted much more detailed and extensive data collection related to these, such as interviews and discussions with administrative and managerial staff of both. I spoke to officials at a range of local educational governance bodies such as the assistant block officer and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (a national department established to promote quality education) office in Thathyur (Jaunpur block headquarters, not far from Kempty as the crow flies but 40 km away by mountain roads), teacher trainers at teacher training courses in Thathyur and Kempty, inter-college principals in Thathyur and Kempty. I conducted research in the government inter-college in Kempty (participant observation, semi-structured interviews and group exercises with students), in the middle and primary schools in Bhatoli village (semi-structured interviews with principal, participant observation and group activities with students), and primary schools in Lagwalgaon (semi-structured interviews with teacher, and group activities with children) and Gairh (semi-structured interview with teachers in their homes) villages. As I have indicated, my interactions with SIDH staff and leadership were extensive and varied in nature; I did conduct focused interviews and group discussions with teachers, as well as research in SIDH primary schools in Kempty, Matela,



Kandikhal, Garkhet, Nautha and Talogi (semi-structured interviews and group discussions with teachers; participant observation and group exercises with students), but most of my ‘data’ on SIDH is based on informal conversations and participant observation in schools, the SIDH campus (meetings, conferences as well as meal-time conversations) and people’s homes. I engaged primarily with village elders and youth in contexts outside schools. I often spent the mornings or afternoon/evening in Kempty and in villages within walking distance from Kempty, and full days in further away villages. Particularly in the winter months, elderly men and women often sat in stone courtyard areas outside their homes to take in the warming sun, many times with babies and toddlers left in their care. Discussions with elders in villages mostly took place in such contexts; only in adverse weather or in the case of particular individual interviews, inside people’s homes or on SIDH village school grounds. Shobhan helped me to identify and gather village youth for group discussions, which were conducted in a SIDH staff members’ home or on SIDH school premises.



Figure 39: Shobhan (left) with Sureshi and Shyam, teachers at SIDH primary school, Nautha village.



Figure 40: Shobhan conducting a research exercise with students at government primary school, Bhatoli village.

The central focus of research questions was how people see the impacts of education in their lives and communities (or, in the case of government school teachers, in the communities in which they work). We thus asked respondents of varying ages and backgrounds about impacts of education on various facets of individual and social life: income generation; agricultural production; animal husbandry; food consumption; consumer goods; disease and sickness; cleanliness and hygiene; employment opportunities; cooperation and local participation; relationships in villages; relationships in families; quality of life; aspirations and dreams; gender roles and identities; language and speech habits; physical appearance; entertainment; marriage choices and customs, and local customs such as festivals. Such questions were asked broadly through quick written exercises (with options to indicate change/no-change and positive/negative), as well as explored in further depth through interviews and group discussions. An additional area of questioning with local youth and elders was regarding their expectations

from school education. With youth and children, I also explored how they perceived the impact of education in relation to other influences (e.g. home, electronic media, *bazaar*, government policies), and aspirations for the future in terms of livelihood, marriage, household structure and place of residence.

A special note is in order on the research I conducted with children (by which I mean young people below the age of fifteen or sixteen, the older ones being loosely categorized as ‘youth’). Most structured data collection from children was conducted in schools, the exception being exercises with groups from regional schools while they were staying on the SIDH campus for short residential courses. I was generally welcome by staff in all schools I visited, who accommodated my requests for time (alone) with school children on their premises. In these sessions (usually about ½ hour to one hour depending on the size of the group), I asked the students to provide brief written responses to a series of questions which I presented orally (and had written up on a chart paper to display as well), often followed by a group discussion. With children, I asked questions about their experiences of school, about aspirations and expectations for the future, but also questions such as ‘what are the best and worst things that you have experienced in your life?’ to get a general sense of children’s life worlds. In reflecting on the worst event of their lives, most children narrated accidents: falling from the roof of the school, swings, or other places while playing or working, or having things like rocks or wood fall on them while doing chores, and hurting themselves in the process. A few spoke about deaths: death of a baby cousin and death of a goat while the child was grazing it. One child talked more broadly about bad behavior, that he insulted people a lot and troubled them, and that he very much disliked being hit. For me, these responses provide a sense of the concerns of these children with basic realities of their daily lives, events that they have themselves experienced,

and based on fundamental emotions like pain, sorrow, fear, guilt. In reflecting on my own childhood, and general cultures of contemporary childhood in the West, it struck me that these were not reflections about broken human relationships, or about material or economic deprivation or anxiety. While elders and youth emphasized tensions around change, these children's responses suggested a sense of underlying security.

At times, children provided extremely perceptive insights and moments of discovery, particularly in SIDH schools where children were more confident and reflective than their peers in government schools. But even in government schools there were such encounters, like when an outspoken girl studying in class five at the government primary school in Lagwalgaon remarked to a classmate who said that he wanted to be a 'driver' after finishing his education: 'but you don't need education to be a driver!' While interactions with children were undoubtedly the most enjoyable, not much of this data has explicitly been included in this dissertation. My sense is that children's life-worlds are very much in flux, defined by change and growth. While I have included a few quotes and anecdotes from my research with children—as in the case of narratives about 'my life's worst event', these provided me with a feel of social and emotional landscapes—I generally felt that children's responses were fleeting; not in the sense of lacking weight but that tying them down to a particular answer or perception would somehow not do them justice.

**From my fieldnotes, a visit to Lagwalgaon government primary school, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

The class four and five students had finished doing their math sums, and Shobhan had told me that he had some ideas of questions to ask them about their homes. So he asked Seema madam if it was ok if we did something with them, and went inside the classroom with them. She said that this was fine. They all sat down in a circle and Shobhan told them to close both the doors tightly so that no one could come in and disturb us. They were very excited. I asked them if they enjoyed talking to us the last time we came, they said “YES!” I asked *kyon?* ‘why?’, and they responded that “*kyonki hum ne apne mann ki baat ki*”, and Shobhan asked “*to hum apne mann ki baat karte hein to acha lagta hei?*”, they replied “HAAAN!” YES! We like to speak from our minds, hearts, selves. I then asked them their names and ages. There were children, eight girls and three boys, and two sets of siblings among them. They were aged nine to thirteen, though quite a few of them seemed to guess their ages or ask and compare with others. Shobhan also asked how many people were in their families, this ranged from six to fourteen, and if they all ate together at home. Excepting one, they all said that they do.

Figures 41: Fieldnote excerpt visit to Lagwalgaon government primary school.

Another experience worth sharing is that people’s responses to my research project, and hence my requests to talk about issues around education and development, were extremely positive. Even when people were busy with household/farm work, studies or school duties, they often went out of their way to be available to me in due course (one of the luxuries of extended fieldwork is that one is not operating on a strict clock-bound schedule). Often, time spent waiting for meetings, duties or chores to be wound up also provided relaxed opportunities for observing people, milieus and routines. I felt that most respondents were genuinely interested in engaging in conversations, and at times even expressed gratitude for ‘being asked’ rather than told. Youth and children often seemed outright excited; in schools I sensed that my research ‘sessions’ provided a welcome break from classroom routines. But as one middle-school aged girl put it, children also enjoyed having a chance to voice *mann ki baat*, one’s own opinions, rather than trying to provide ‘right’ answers. Such responses encouraged me to see value in the research process, as a form of social engagement and giving voice to people, issues and perspectives which may otherwise remain largely silent or invisible. Similarly, they helped me

to analytically situate my overall focus on the content of people's narratives rather than performances. My position is that just like research is an analytic act of contextualization and evaluation, people's reflections are representations and theorizations of their situations. There will certainly be discrepancies between what people say and what they do, and at times these tensions certainly merit examination, yet not, I feel, as an attempt to uncover some empirical 'Truth'. My trust in people's narratives is therefore about recognizing others as fellow human beings, attempting to make sense of and doing the best they can in the contexts of their lives, and choosing to represent themselves to me in a particular way.

As any reflexive researcher will have experienced, there are always ethical questions at stake, about power and privilege entailed in a 'researcher' engaging with contexts and people's lives as 'research subjects'—and, in my case, in critically examining questions around education as someone pursuing higher education from a prestigious American university. During the course of my fieldwork, at times such questions troubled me, but in my mind I also countered such doubts with a sense of the value of the questions I was exploring. Ultimately, research for me was also a means of extending and deepening relationships; with individuals and the 'family' of SIDH above all, but also community members in Jaunpur. In terms of 'giving back', my engagements were primarily with SIDH: I conducted particular activities with children and teachers in SIDH schools (arts and crafts and a social studies project on local resource mapping with school children; English-discussion sessions and general support to teachers), and became a 'resource person' for SIDH's Gap Year College, a residential course offered on the SIDH campus in 2007 and 2008. Perhaps most significantly, but also, on hindsight, ambiguous, was the time and energy that I committed to a process of 'rethinking' the organization; engaging in formal and informal dialogues about the value, shortcomings and possible futures. Was this a

role that I should have taken on, given my inability at the time to commit concrete and long-term responsibility for actualizing changes? I am not sure, but certainly (as Mosse (2005) describes in his research *on* an aid organization that he was also working *with*) in my work with SIDH, the lines between ‘social investigation’ and ‘lived experience’ blurred significantly, for better or worse.



Figure 41: Card-making with students at SIDH primary school, Nautha with my mother when she visited me in Kempty.



Figure 43: Students displaying their beautiful cards.

## APPENDIX B

### DABLA-MATELA VILLAGE ECONOMIC SURVEY: ESTIMATED CHANGES FROM 1986-2006

While participant observation, semi-structured interviews, short-answer or multiple-choice indicative surveys and group discussions were the primary qualitative research methods I made use of, Shobhan and I did conduct one ‘rough’ village economic survey which deserves special mention. I use the word ‘rough’ because it would not qualify as a precise survey of household economies (and neither of us were equipped to satisfactorily analyze the quantitative data obtained through such a survey), but I do feel that the manner in which we conducted the exercise fulfilled our intended purposes, and I have made use of the data obtained in my analysis in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

In the course of informal conversations that Shobhan and I had with elders in four villages in the valley about what kinds of socio-economic changes they have seen over the last twenty years, we repeatedly heard the perception that during this time education has increased, and income has decreased. To further probe the substantive meanings of these comments, we conducted a basic survey of one of the villages where such perceptions had been voiced. We generally consulted the male household head in the sixteen households in Dabla-Matela about current household economies, as well as perceptions about production, income and expenses twenty years ago.

The village of Dabla-Matela consists of two small settlements with a total population of one hundred and sixty-six people. The hamlets are located about five hundred meters apart, and separated by a perennial stream and a wide terrace of sloping fields. There is an unpaved road that skirts both settlements, and connects to a paved road leading to the larger qasba of Kempt



(3 km), the tourist day-trip site of Kempty Falls (3 km) and the hill-station town of Mussoorie (15 km). In Matela, there is a primary school run by the Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalaya (SIDH), a local NGO, which has been operational for about fifteen years. Young children either attend this school or the government primary school in the nearby village of Lagwalgaon, which has existed for about 20 years. After class five, most children now attend at least a few years of junior high school and high school in Kempty.

Shobhan, my research assistant, and I prepared a survey form breaking down sources of income and expenditure, and orally asked respondents for their estimates on contemporary household economies (2006), and twenty years earlier. Clearly, respondents' could only provide rough estimates, especially of the condition of their household economy in 1986. Yet given that the intention of conducting the survey was to substantiate generally expressed perceptions of socio-economic decline, and what this meant, such notional estimates served our purpose. Hence, rather than an attempt to compare oral reports of perceived decline with the 'reality' or 'facts' of household income and expenditure, the survey was rather the researchers' attempt to concretize, and hopefully bring forward more substantial meanings, to comparative terms such as 'worse off' which were repeatedly used by village elders in the course of conversations about the present and past.

Since Shobhan had extensive experience of living and working in the region, he was able to provide a basic list of indicators. Hence, income (considered first for 1986 then the present, 2006) was broadly broken down into agriculture, animal husbandry, and employment. Agricultural production was divided by major crops (wheat; paddy; maize; *jhangora* (barnyard millet); *mandva* (finger millet); pulses and vegetables). Animal husbandry was broken down into numbers of animals owned by the household (cows; bullocks; goats; sheep and buffaloes),

as well as income obtained from trade of animals and milk. Employment was categorized into income earned from labor (number of days engaged and estimated cash income) and government service (number of family members employed and income obtained). Production figures were translated into rupee amounts based on rough estimates of current rates (for 2006, halved for 1986) by Shobhan, as well as experiential estimates of what percentage of particular crops were sold for income versus used for household sustenance. Total incomes were divided by source, and further aggregated by agricultural and non-agricultural sources.

Expenditures were similarly broken down (food; clothing; festivals; weddings; education; health; alcohol; tobacco; house construction, transportation/travel and entertainment). People's estimates of expenditure twenty years prior were less specific than for income—for example zero expenditure was reported on marriages, medicine, construction, travel and entertainment. We took this as indicative of a perception that comparatively, cash income on these was negligible, as this generally coincides with the sustenance-oriented lifestyle and production patterns which prevailed in this region twenty years ago.

We conducted the survey over two days in January 2007. Shobhan asked most of the questions as several elder respondents were addressed in Jaunpuri rather than Hindi. He also noted down their answers in a prepared chart. We primarily consulted family elders, but at times found that younger family members were able to provide more concrete estimates hence included these figures. Data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet by Shobhan, and figures analyzed by the two of us together. I deduced follow-up questions; some of which Shobhan was able to answer, for others we consulted a teacher at the SIDH school in Matela (a local resident, head of his household).

Generally, the overall finding which we were most interested in was that contrary to popular perceptions, the overall village economy was running at a decent financial surplus, rather than at a loss. However, in terms of real production as well as its contribution to overall income, the role of agriculture has declined significantly. Agriculture can no longer be considered the economic mainstay of this village; real agricultural output has declined and at the same time village resources come increasingly from extra-agricultural sources. Currently, only about thirty percent of village income comes from agriculture and animal husbandry, while seventy percent is obtained from other employment (wage labor or private service employment, mostly temporary or seasonal in nearby tourist towns of Kempty Falls and Mussoorie). Twenty years ago, a rough estimate of fifty-six percent of income came from agriculture and animal husbandry, while forty-four percent was obtained through other employment—hence there has been a twenty-six percent decline in the proportion of income from agriculture and animal husbandry, and an equivalent increase in the proportion of income from other sources of employment. Our survey indicated that for most households in Dabla-Matela, it is not cash income that is declining but a sense of worth and value obtained through agrarian production, and this is the loss that they had expressed. In their evaluation of their economy, people in this village had implicitly emphasized the value of agriculture and animal husbandry, as assets and wealth, and as the mainstay of a relatively secure, non-marketized economy.

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